Queer British Television: Policy and Practice, 1997-2007

Natalie Edwards

PhD thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham

School of American and Canadian Studies, January 2010

Abstract

Representations of gay, lesbian, queer and other non-heterosexualities on British terrestrial television have increased exponentially since the mid 1990s. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer characters now routinely populate mainstream series, while programmes like Queer as Folk (1999-2000), Tipping the Velvet (2002), Torchwood (2006-) and Bad Girls (1999-2006) have foregrounded specifically gay and lesbian themes. This increase correlates to a number of gay-friendly changes in UK social policy pertaining to sexual behaviour and identity, changes precipitated by the election of Tony Blair's Labour government in 1997. Focusing primarily on the decade following Blair's installation as Prime Minister, this project examines a variety of gay, lesbian and queer-themed British television programmes in the context of their political, cultural and industrial determinants, with the goal of bridging the gap between the cultural product and the institutional factors which precipitated its creation. Ultimately, it aims to establish how and why this increase in LGBT and queer programming occurred when it did by relating it to the broader, government-sanctioned integration of gays, lesbians and queers into the imagined cultural mainstream of the UK.

Unlike previous studies of lesbian, gay and queer film and television, which have tended to draw conclusions about cultural trends purely through textual analysis, this project uses government and broadcasting industry policy documents as well as detailed examination of specific television programmes to substantiate links between the cultural product and the wider world. The main body of the thesis comprises five chapters, including three industrial case studies examining the four main terrestrial broadcasters- Channel 4, Channel 5, ITV and the BBC- and their gay, lesbian and queer output between 1997 and 2007. Again by analysing policy documents and the distinct public service obligations of each broadcaster, these case studies link the brand identities and imagined audiences of each with the range and volume of LGBT and queer programming they produced within the ten year period studied. In doing so, they also consider the effect of digitisation and the multi-channel environment on the specific types of queer and LGBT programming provided by each broadcaster, and the impact of niche-market broadcasting on the presentation of sexual difference within the contemporary UK context.

Contents

Queer Television Production, 1997-2007: An Introduction

How social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life [...] The resonances of the term 'representation' suggest as much. How a group is represented, presented again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights society claims to ensure its citizens. Equally representation, representativeness, representing have to do also with how others see members of a group and their place and rights, others who have the power to affect that place and those rights. How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation.[1]

Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, p1.

Before writing this introduction, I quizzed several friends on their recollections of queer programmes and instances of queer visibility as they occurred on terrestrial television in the mid 1990s. One recalled *Queer Street* (1997-98), a series of documentaries, shorts and feature films on a lesbian and gay theme broadcast by Channel 4 post-watershed across four successive Saturday nights- and watched, in his case, with the volume down low, after his parents had gone to bed. Another spoke fondly of the BBC's *You Rang,*

---

[1] Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, p1. London: Routledge, 2002.

M'Lord? (1988-93), a 1920s-set sitcom parodying the earlier drama *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1971) which ran for several years and which featured a butch, implicitly lesbian woman (Catherine Rabett) among its cast of characters. A third proved unexpectedly enthusiastic about *Eurotrash* (1993-2003), a surreal Friday night magazine and clip show co-presented by the openly gay fashion designer Jean-Paul Gaultier, which touched upon an array of queer and sexually-explicit themes. All, however, agreed on one point when it came to queer television in Britain in the mid 1990s: there wasn't much of it at all, and what little there was (*You Rang, M'Lord?* notwithstanding) was mostly to be found on Channel 4, buried in the schedules in the middle of the night.

As of mid 2009, the LGBT and queer television landscape of the UK is configured rather differently. Even a brief glimpse of the terrestrial viewing figures of the previous month reveal prime-time schedules saturated with queer content. The highest rated British serial drama, ITV's *Coronation Street* (1960-) now features a gay male character, barman Sean Tully (Anthony Cotton) in a relatively long-standing and prominent role; others have appeared within the show in recent years in more transient or less central parts. Channel 4's teen soap *Hollyoaks* (1995-), currently broadcast at 6.30pm on weekday evenings, has featured an array of gay, lesbian and queer characters and couplings in its recent history, including one gay priest, and currently has several gay men and one lesbian on its roster. 4's most popular talk show is hosted by out comedian Paul O'Grady, perhaps better known as drag queen Lily Savage, its equally popular fashion show *How To Look Good Naked* (2006-) by out presenter Gok Wan. The BAFTA-winning drama *Shameless* (2004-), notable here for its inclusion of a gay

teenage boy, a lesbian mother and (in its early episodes) a great deal of interracial male/male sex, regularly attracts viewers in the several millions. Out actor, comedian and writer Stephen Fry is currently to be found on any number of channels, throughout the daytime and evening, whether as host of the successful BBC quiz show *QI* (2003-), the protagonist of the prime time ITV legal drama *Kingdom* (2007-) or the presenter of his own recent six-part US travelogue (2008). In 2009, gay, lesbian and queer representations abound on British television.

The opening epigraph, taken from Richard Dyer's *The Matter of Images*, explains at least in part why the issue of gay, lesbian and queer visibility-of "representation"-was so relevant to individual queers in the mid 1990s, and why it continues to be so as of 2009. As Dyer observes, the cultural depictions of social minorities suggest to these minorities not only how the world regards them, but how they ought to regard themselves. Low visibility offers only limited images or representations with which individual gays, lesbians and queers might identify. More than this, though, it suggests that they do not matter enough to be represented at all, that their representation is of only minimal interest to the creators of cultural material. Increased visibility conversely signals not only the increased social acceptance of queers, gays and lesbians, but also their designation as acceptable by cultural architects, and specifically in this instance by broadcasters.

Dyer's second point, that the legal and cultural rights afforded social minorities can be discerned from the modes of their cultural visibility, is equally relevant here. By examining the sharp increase in gay, lesbian and queer visibility on British television

since 1997, this project posits a relationship between broadcast media images, industrial practice and government policy. In doing so, it aims to determine how and why alterations to British law and within British broadcasting institutions affected television programming so profoundly as to engender the explosion of gay, lesbian and queer images discussed.

Institutions, Policy and Practice

British media representations of queer sexualities have changed perceptibly since the mid 1990s. The cultural visibility of LGBT and queer Britons has increased exponentially, with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender characters now routinely populating television programmes, and the mainstream press often covering gay and lesbian stories as a matter of course. Increased visibility is not the only facet of this alteration, however. Until recently, non-heterosexuals constituted a minority community within the wider British populace. The election of Tony Blair's New Labour government in 1997, though, marked the beginning of a sea change in cultural and political attitudes to non- hetero sexuality, witnessed by a number of queer- positive changes to existing policy and legislation in the years that followed and the broader elision of sexual difference within British media culture. Terrestrial television has provided space for the negotiation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues and identities. This project examines representations of queerness on British television in the decade following Blair's installation as Prime Minister, and aims both to interrogate the mapping of queerness onto the UK's broadcasting landscape and to analyse the cultural, political and industrial determinants of its assimilation into the mainstream.

Recent changes to British law on sexual behaviour and identity have effected a radical impact on British culture generally and British broadcasting specifically. The abolition of Section 28, the lowering of the gay male age of consent, the introduction of Civil Partnerships and the enforcement of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Act all occurred between 1997 and 2007, and all contributed to the creation of a cultural climate wherein the production and commissioning of gay, lesbian and queer-themed television material might be deemed viable. The impact of recent broadcasting policy on programme-making is likewise significant. The creation of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in 1997, the passing of the 2003 Communications Act and the subsequent establishment of Ofcom, for example, all served to inform television executive and editorial decisions pertaining to programme content. Writing on the representation of racial identity and specifically "blackness" on British television, Sarita Malik considers the impact of government policy on broadcasting, technological development and "increased market competition" on the "structural imperatives" of UK broadcasting.[2] "In light of these shifts," she suggests, "television itself- its programmes, its role, its value, its past, its future, its economics, its duopoly stronghold, its relation to nationhood, citizenship and the public- is being re-evaluated and strategically modified."[3] This project takes these alterations in the "structural imperatives" of British broadcasting as its starting point, outlining and interrogating the relationship of such policy and legislation (as well as of commercial imperatives and market forces) to queer programming, the broadcast output. It assesses where applicable the effect of public

---

[2] Sarita Malik, *Representing Black Britain: Black and Asian Images on Television*, p9. London: Sage, 2002.
[3] Ibid.

service remits on queer and sexual minority broadcasting, as well as the effect of digitisation and the multi-channel digital environment on programme making and marketing, and especially on channel brand identity. The term "public service broadcasting" in this context refers to television which must (according to the terms of its parent broadcaster's licence) serve a distinct public interest or interests rather than simply pursue a commercial agenda. The working definition of public service broadcasting as utilised by this project refers (unless otherwise specified) to the phrase as it appears within the policy documents and literature produced by the UK government (for example, the 2003 Communications Act), its regulatory bodies (for example, Ofcom) and the broadcasting institutions themselves (for example, the BBC).

An in-depth review of the available literature pertinent to the topics of queer television, queer theory, British television industries and the contemporary UK political climate follows this introduction. Literature specifically *about* queer television however, in the UK or otherwise, is scarce.[4] In a recent collection of essays concerning queer televison, one of the first of its kind, Gary Needham and Glyn Davies critique the relative "neglect of television in debates about queer media and queer screen culture."[5] The "ascendency of queer theory in the 1990s," they note, "seemed to bypass television almost entirely," while those articles and books interrogating "individual instances of programming, exploring the ramifications and nuances of particular lesbian/gay/bisexual/trans/queer

---

[4] Detailed discussion of the terms "queer," "gay" and "lesbian" as they appear throughout this project are provided in the literature review and Chapter 1. For the purposes of this introduction, "gay" and "lesbian" (and specifically "gay and lesbian television") pertain to instances of visibility in which characters and scenarios identify or are identified as possessing a gayor lesbian identity, as *being* gay, and being defined in identity terms through their same-sex attraction; queer (and specifically "queer television") conversely pertains to instances of non-heterosexual, and particularly non-heteronormative visibility, which are not necessarily identifiably gay or lesbian.

[5] Gary Needham and Glyn Davis, *Queer TV*, p1. London: Routledge, 2009.

characters and their associated plots and narratives" have tended to offer "evaluative comments on the 'positive' or 'negative' representations in these shows, denouncing or advocating certain strategies of depiction and articulation."[6] What they have failed on the whole to provide is much substantial discussion of the context in which these gay, lesbian and queer representations were produced: specifically interrogation and analysis of the complex, multifaceted and frequently symbiotic relationship that exists between the television text and the wider world. This project conversely seeks to engage with the wider world first, as a means of establishing how and why the gay, lesbian and queer television produced after 1997 came to be: to explore the industrial, cultural and political contexts surrounding its production, and to forge substantive links between these contexts and the television texts that emerged from them.

The primary purpose of the project is to bridge the gap between this one mode of gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer representation, British television programming, and the multiple external factors which determined its production and content between 1997 and 2007. Government policy, television industrial policy and the specific production and commissioning policies of individual broadcasters and broadcasting institutions: all of these contributed directly to the queer and lesbian, gay and bisexual images produced within this programming. So too did the (as discussed, rather more nebulous and difficult to identify) changes within British culture regarding sexuality and sexual behaviour. While each of these elements-the programming, the policy and the cultural climate-are necessarily interconnected, it is also useful for the purposes of this research project to consider them as links within a distinct sequence of events. Policy and

---

[6] Ibid.

legislation pertaining to television broadcasting and the social and economic integration of LGBT citizens into an imagined cultural mainstream emerged from the media, cultural and political climate of mid 1990s Britain. From this policy and legislation, as well as often related commercial imperatives evolved individual broadcasters' policies on the production of gay, lesbian and queer programming. From *these* policies emerged the individual programmes themselves. Specific cultural and industrial factors have determined the form and content of recent British lesbian, gay and queer television programming. Consideration of these factors allows us to determine how and why such programming occurred when it did. Necessarily, such consideration also entails some understanding of the distinct historical, political, social, ideological, commercial and industrial factors which converged between 1997 and 2007 to create gay, lesbian and queer programming deemed viable both by British audiences and by the television industry.

Again in the context of race and blackness on British television, Sarita Malik argues that institutional factors are paramount when considering the subject of representation in broadcasting. "Issues which relate to television's commissioning structures, scheduling, exhibition, viewing practices, recruitment procedures and production frameworks," she suggests, "need to be situated within the distinct industrial context of (public service) broadcasting" if the type(s) of representation offered by individual programme texts are to be understood.[7] This project gives primacy to these institutional factors, ultimately assessing them both as products of political, ideological and cultural forces, and as

---

[7] Sarita Malik, *Representing Black Britain*, pp23-24.

progenitors of the individual programmes so often considered to comprise the entirety of "queer television."

Branding

The proliferation of cable, satellite and then digital television technologies in the UK and beyond in the 1990s has necessitated that broadcasting enter what Catherine Johnson terms "the era of branding," a concept discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.[8]

As competition for audiences increases and ever more channels appear on the market, British terrestrial broadcasters must distinguish themselves from other providers both terrestrial and non-terrestrial through the development of strong brand identities, which indicate to potential viewers the "core values" and target viewership of the provider in question, and which give a suggestion of the specific kind of programme content likely to be offered by their channel(s). Focusing exclusively on what were between 1997 and 2007 the four British terrestrial television broadcasters-Channel 4, the BBC, ITV and Channel 5/Five-this project proposes a link between channel brand identity and gay, lesbian and queer programme content in the contemporary UK context, and suggests that the manifold differences in the type of gay, lesbian and queer programming presented by each broadcaster derive in large part from differences in the respective 'brands.'

---

[8] Catherine Johnson, 'Telebranding in TV III: The Network as Brand and the Programme as Brand,' p6. *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 5: 1, April 2007.

Via a series of industrial case studies, the following chapters examine and explicate this link, analysing both the content of recent gay, lesbian and queer themed programmes (*Sugar Rush*, *Tipping The Velvet*, *Bad Girls*, and so on) and the policy and practice of the broadcasting institutions out of which they emerged. Since the project also seeks to substantiate links between broader cultural and political change regarding sexual difference and an overall increase in gay, lesbian and queer media visibility in the UK since the 1990s, an early chapter is given over to discussion of the possible social, cultural and political determinants of this newly augmented visibility.

Queers, Dykes and Terrestrial Broadcasting: A (Brief) Historical Overview

Some knowledge of queer television prior to 1997, as well as of the specific social and contextual circumstances of its production, is obviously necessary to a comprehensive understanding of this project's topic. With this in mind, the following survey provides a broad overview of the kinds of queerness represented within British television broadcasting in the decades before Tony Blair's election. It begins with the coy, often euphemistic programming of the 1970s that followed the legalisation of homosexuality in the UK and concludes with *This Life* (1996), the BBC2 drama lauded and derided in equal measure at the time of its broadcast for its uncompromising depictions of among other things, gay male sexuality. The main body of this thesis aims to analyse contemporary queer television in the context of the industrial, cultural and political environments out of which it arose, using textual analysis primarily as a springboard for the discussion of these environments, and as a means of substantiating links between

government policy, cultural change and television industrial practice. However, in the interests of brevity and, perhaps more importantly, in the absence of enough gay, lesbian and queer themed broadcast material from which to draw substantive links between policy and industrial practice, this brief survey takes the opposite approach. It assesses the LGB and queer themed programmes discussed in terms of the types and volume of visibility each offered by the four terrestrial channels operating in the UK in the pre-1997 period, in the hope that tacit conclusions about each individual broadcaster's attitude to the handling of queer and LGB issues might be drawn from their content.

Televisual representations of non-hetero sexuality in Britain in the 1970s were both predominantly male, and predominantly effeminate in character. As discussed in later chapters, and with particular reference to the earlier years of the BBC, the images of gay masculinity that proliferated in broadcasting during this period tended towards the Larry Grayson/ Kenneth Williams variety, and mostly comprised implicitly queer male characters and entertainers who connoted queerness in their manner and behaviour, rather than openly affirmed it, verbally or otherwise. Perhaps the best example of this tendency is provided by the enormously popular BBC1 department store-set sitcom *Are You Being Served?* (1972-1985). The show was responsible for introducing into British popular culture the camp retail clerk character Mr. Humphries, played by gay actor John Inman, whose catchphrase "I'm free!" was widely interpreted as a comment on his sexual availability as well as a reference to his helpfulness to customers. The Mr. Humpries character was criticised by, among other groups, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, which considered his effeminacy an unhelpfully absurd and

stereotypical presentation of gay male identity, designed to elicit the ridicule of heterosexual audiences. As Murray Healy observes, however, the introduction of a character explicitly marked as gay in voice and manner- even one as flamboyant and "mincing" as Humphries- served at least to bring (one very specific form of) queerness onto the radar of mainstream British television audience, at a time when gay, lesbian and queer visibility in any form was lacking. Moreover, as he suggests, Humphries did not necessarily represent a distorted caricature of then-contemporary male homosexuality, exaggerated for comic effect, but rather may well have "reflected the way [some] gay men at that time were addressing and communicating their sexual identity."[9]

ITV's *The Naked Civil Servant* (1975) also foregrounded an effeminate and flamboyant gay male character, but in a rather more nuanced and three-dimensional manner. Based on the autobiography of the gay writer and self-described "stately homo" Quentin Crisp (John Hurt), the TV-movie adaptation highlighted Crisp's efforts to live as an openly gay, effeminate man in the early to mid twentieth century. It dramatised the oppressively, often violently homophobic social climate of the UK in the years prior to the legalisation of homosexuality and valorised Crisp's refusal to conceal his sexual identity and behaviour, even when confronted by such violence. A direct-to-camera address by the real-life Crisp at the beginning of the film, describing his response to the notion that a film be written about his early life, also lent the production a gravitas and pro-gay political dimension it might otherwise have lacked. Crisp's suggestion that "any film, even the worst, is at least better than real life" further underscored the hardships

---

[9] Murray Healy, 'Were we being served? Homosexual Representations in Popular British Comedy,' p249. *Screen* 36:3, 1995.

and suffering his sexual identity had brought upon him in the years before the legalisation of homosexuality.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw only a few instances of gay, lesbian and queer visibility on terrestrial television, most notably in two other ITV productions. The Maureen Lipman-fronted sitcom *Agony* (1979) featured a gay male couple in fairly prominent supporting roles, while the lavish adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1981), though not explicitly gay in content, focused on the emotionally charged, powerfully homoerotic relationship between two effete male characters. However, the launch of Channel 4 in 1982 (discussed in detail in Chapter 3) gave rise to a new wave of gay, lesbian and queer-themed programming as well as numerous other shows intended to appeal to other "minority" audiences, beginning with the flagship soap opera *Brookside* (1982), which wrote the coming-out of a gay male character, Gordon Collins (Mark Burgess), into its narrative thread very early on. Charles Morris and Jim Sloop assert that "public kissing between men remains crucially problematic" in the mainstream media in a way that "[kissing between] women, long a staple in straight male erotic fantasy" does not.[10] According with this observation, *Brookside* saw fit to deliver no same sex physical intimacy until the well-publicised *lesbian* kiss between two female characters in 1994. The BBC1 soap opera *Eastenders* (1985) followed suit in 1986 with the introduction of another gay male character, Colin Russell (Michael Cashman), and then in 1987 with a (very chaste) same-sex kiss, albeit on the forehead, between Colin and his then-boyfriend Barry (Gary Hailes). This kiss was also the first of its kind

---

[10] Charles E. Morris and Jim M. Sloop, '"What Lips These Lips Have Kissed": Refiguring the Politics of Queer Public Kissing,' p2. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3:1, 2006.

on primetime terrestrial television, and was at the time a source of great consternation to sections of the British press, who as a result briefly dubbed the show "EastBenders."[11] Not until 1989 would *Eastenders* screen its first 'proper' gay kiss, on the lips, between Colin and a subsequent boyfriend, Guido (Nicholas Donovan), to a rather more muted media response.

1989 was notable also for the first appearance of what would become a major lesbian character, Zoe Tate (Leah Bracknell), within another soap opera, ITV's *Emmerdale* (1972), and for the arrival of Channel 4's *Out on Tuesday* (later simply *Out*), the first magazine-style programme on UK television dedicated exclusively to the exploration of gay and lesbian issues. Though not out until 1993, Zoe Tate would remain with *Emmerdale* until 2005, setting a further precedent for British broadcasting by "marrying" her then-girlfriend in a non-legally-recognised commitment ceremony in 1996, while *Out on Tuesday/ Out* ran until 1994, and was followed in 1995 by 4's *Dyke TV*, a mixed season of films, documentaries and other lesbian-themed programming. Indeed, from the early 1990s onwards, gay, lesbian and queer- themed programming appeared more and more frequently on Channel 4, often at more audience friendly hours than before. The serialised adaptation of Armistead Maupin's San Francisco-set *Tales of the City* (1993), produced by the Channel 4 Corporation and featuring an array of queer characters, debuted on C4 in May 1993, in an evening timeslot presumably designed to capitalise on the success of Maupin's novel. Later that year, 4 also delivered *Camp Christmas*, a festive variety and sketch show hosted by out musicians Andy Bell

---

[11] For a more detailed commentary on the minor press scandal surrounding the Eastenders kiss, see for example Terry Sanderson, *Mediawatch: Treatment of Male and Female Homosexuality in the British Media*. London: Cassell, 1995.

and Melissa Etheridge and featuring contributions from gay, lesbian and queer celebrities as disparate as Stephen Fry, Pedro Almodóvar, Martina Navratilova and former US army colonel and don't-ask-don't-tell casualty Margarethe Cammermeyer. Though largely improvised and experimental in format, and though no such concept has since been implemented on any channel in the years since its transmission, *Camp Christmas* again served a useful purpose in allowing for an increased queer and LGBT visibility and media presence.

By 1990, the BBC had warmed sufficiently to the topic of homosexuality to commission a three-part adaptation of Jeanette Winterson's lesbian bildungsroman *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1990), screened on BBC2 and discussed in detail in Chapter 3, which examines queer programming and the institutional practices of the BBC. It followed this in 1993 with another queer literary drama, a serialised adaptation of Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1993), whose bisexual, biracial protagonist Karim (Naveen Andrews) was seen to enjoy sexual and romantic encounters with both women and men. Minor gay male characters also appeared in other early 1990s BBC productions, notably the short-lived soap *El Dorado* (1992-93) and the long-running sitcom *The Brittas Empire* (1991-97), while the phenomenally successful *Absolutely Fabulous* (1992-2005) provided numerous instances of queer, if not explicitly gay or lesbian visibility, despite also featuring several gay, lesbian and bisexual characters in minor roles: not least, through its presentation of a central character, the chain-smoking alcoholic fashionista Patsy Stone (Joanna Lumley), who underwent a gender reassignment procedure in the 1970s and lived briefly as a man, before "it fell off." Frances Williams among others also draws attention to the popularity of *Absolutely*

Fabulous among gay, lesbian and queer audiences, speculating that gay men in particular

> [read] Patsy and [the show's other main character] Edina as gay men, identifying with them as men 'dragged up' as women: here are men 'behaving badly,' but as *women*. Gay men […] identify with the female characters because their behaviour is so unlike female behaviour, which is regulated by strict conventions of 'taste and decency.'[12]

In 1994, a year on from *Brookside*'s benchmark same-sex kiss, *Eastenders* introduced an (interracial) lesbian couple of its own, Della and Binnie (Michelle Joseph and Sophie Langham) whose lengthy coming-out kissing scene prompted a significant volume of complaints from viewers to the Broadcasting Standards Council. By 1995, the BBC had also established its own gay and lesbian magazine programme, BBC2's *Gaytime TV* (1995), which ran for several years in a late-evening timeslot.

The mid-1990s saw further instances of gay, lesbian and queer visibility appear within terrestrial programming. The original ITV crime drama *She's Out* (1995), a sequel to the much earlier *Widows* (1983) featured a lesbian couple among its cast of criminal characters. It was the BBC2 drama *This Life* (1996) however that best indicated the shape of things to come in terms of gay, lesbian and queer programming on British television thereafter. Focusing on a group of twenty something professionals sharing a house in South London, *This Life* integrated gay, lesbian and queer themes, plots and

---

[12] Frances Williams, 'Suits and Sequins: Lesbian Comedians in Britain and the US in the 1990s,' p160. Ed. Stephen Wagg, *Because I Tell A Joke Or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference.* London: Routledge, 1998.

characters into its overall multi-strand narrative structure without ever being promoted

by the BBC as 'queer drama.' Several of the show's characters-notably gay solicitor

Warren (Jason Hughes), bisexual motorcycle courier Ferdy (Ramon Tikaram) and

mostly-heterosexual barrister Anna (Daniela Nardini)-were shown to engage in same-

sex sexual and romantic activity. Anna briefly dated a woman; Warren cruised for sex in

public toilets; Ferdy most notably enjoyed what was (at the time, for the BBC) quite

graphically rendered and explicitly anal sex with another man during the second series.

The main characters frequently discussed or alluded to gay, lesbian and queer issues.

Though homophobia featured occasionally within the show (such as when Warren's

brother took issue with his sexuality) it was very much the province of outsiders,

secondary characters and those at best peripheral to the narrative, often of an older

generation or associated with a non-urban environment. Warren's army officer brother,

for example, strongly identified with small-town Wales and its (seemingly conservative)

values, and appeared in the show only when briefly visiting Warren in the city. The core

(young, urban, predominantly heterosexual) group of characters adopted, by and large,

an accepting, cosmopolitan approach to sexual difference, regarding it as merely

another facet of contemporary existence.[13] In this respect, *This Life* itself may be

considered among the first British television productions to have embraced a

cosmopolitan perspective on queerness- though, as subsequent chapters demonstrate, it

was by no means the last to do so.

---

[13] Clear definitions of the terms "cosmopolitan" and "cosmopolitanism" as they appear in this context are provided in the following literature review, and in subsequent sections of this project.

While far from exhaustive, the above survey bears out the observations about gay, lesbian and queer visibility on British television discussed in the opening paragraphs of this introduction: that, in and prior to the mid 1990s, there wasn't very much of it at all, and what little of it there *was* was mostly to be found on Channel 4 (or more infrequently BBC2), buried in the schedules in the middle of the night, or at the very least later in the evening than more mainstream shows which eschewed queer and LGB content.

That Channel 4, and to a lesser extent BBC2 were the channels most likely to deliver overtly queer and LGB programme content to their audiences, and so the most likely to engage in what might be considered risky production, commissioning and broadcasting behaviour articulate the relationships of these channels with these imagined audiences. So Channel 4, with its remit to cater for minority audiences, delivered a range of gay, lesbian and queer themed programmes most frequently and most enthusiastically, where BBC2 with its reputation (discussed at length in Chapter 3) for screening cerebral drama and literary adaptations provided instances of gay, lesbian queer visibility in the context of quality television. Thus, channel identity and brand identity have to some extent determined, and continue to determine the volume and type of lesbian, gay and queer visibility present on a given terrestrial channel.

Beyond this introduction, the project is divided into five chapters, the latter three industrial case studies. Chapter 1 contextualises the project within existing scholarship. Chapter 2 analyses in depth the political and cultural determinants of lesbian, gay and queer media visibility in the 1990s and 2000s. The case studies begin with an

examination of Channel 4, perhaps the most forward-thinking channel in terms of its representations of non-hetero sexualities. Chapter 3 discusses Channel 4's post-1997 negotiation of its public service remit and development of a cutting-edge brand identity through its commissioning of gay and lesbian programmes with explicitly consumerist and/or cosmopolitan themes. The chapter links Rosemary Hennessy's writing on postmodern queer identity and commodification and the journalist Mark Simpson's work on 'metrosexuality' and contemporary masculinity with Ulrich Beck and Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs' work on cosmopolitanism and sexual difference. It then links these ideas to the government's implementation of a Third Way economic policy, arguing that C4 has sought in recent years to side-step its public service obligations by contributing to the mainstreaming of queer sexualities. Specifically, the chapter suggests that, by seamlessly assimilating queer content into the fabric of its programmes, the channel not only normalises queerness, but strips it of its minority status- thus releasing itself from its duty to cater to minority audiences, and so freeing itself to commission more commercially- viable programming. Case studies of *Sugar Rush* (2005-06) and *Skins* (2007-) illustrate broader points about queer youth television on C4 and E4 in the 2000s, while *Queer as Folk* (1999-2000) and *Metrosexuality* (1999) serve as the focal points for discussion about cosmopolitanism and terrestrial drama

Chapter 4 focuses on the BBC, and encompasses the identification and analysis of the queer programming featured since 1997 on all of the Corporation's digital and analogue channels: BBC1, BBC2, BBC3 and BBC4. The chapter incorporates discussion both of queer comedy such as *Little Britain* (2003-06) and *Gimme Gimme Gimme* (1999-2001) and its capacity for the containment of potentially transgressive or objectionable queer

material, and of a relatively new configuration of an often conservative genre: the queer costume drama. It suggests that recent adaptations of queer historical novels-for example, *Tipping the Velvet* (2002) and *Fingersmith* (2005)-work not only to garner prestige and ratings for the broadcaster, but to promote a specific multicultural (and queer- positive) agenda- and specifically that, by inserting queers into its historical narratives, the BBC functions to 'queer' history, and so to reflect the cultural ideals of the New Labour era. It also examines the role of science fiction and similar genre programming on the BBC (through analysis of *Torchwood* (2006-)) as a means of containing potentially disruptive or anti-assimilationist ideas about sexual fluidity.

Chapter 5 examines queer programming on British commercial television as a means of attracting audiences away from the BBC. Specifically, it analyses ITV's deployment of queer material in the context of the broadcaster's longstanding competition with the BBC. Where the recent queer output of Channel 4 and the BBC can be understood in relation to the brand identities of the channels on which they appear, the absence of a distinct ITV brand identity problematises the notion of a distinctly 'ITV' style of queer programming. The chapter therefore looks at the scheduling practices employed by ITV in disseminating its queer material. It similarly investigates how these practices relate to the BBC's scheduling, and its attempts to 'queer' certain kinds of genre programming: broadly, how queer television on ITV can be interpreted as an effort to engage and compete with similarly queer projects broadcast on its rival channel. Five/Channel 5 is likewise examined in terms of its absence of a brand identity, or rather in terms of its place within the greater British television landscape. The relative scarcity of queer programming on Five/ Channel 5 is examined in relation to the original "films, fucking

and football" remit laid out by Dawn Airey in the late 1990s, and in relation to the channel's early attempts to construct a predominantly young, masculine, New Lad audience.

The structure of all of these chapters inevitably entails some consideration of programming context. Chapter 3 in particular engages with the issues resulting from screening imported programmes in a British context, and especially the relationship of ostensibly 'postfeminist' shows like *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004) and *Ally McBeal* (Fox, 1997-2002) to both British queer programming and channel brand identity. Following Ron Becker's 'straight panic' argument, which suggests that American sitcoms throughout the 1990s negotiated straight audiences' anxieties about queerness through mistaken- identity scenarios that ultimately affirmed their characters' heterosexuality, this project contends that US comedy imports, particularly those first broadcast in the UK on C4 and E4, helped to carve space within Britain's broadcasting climate for the discussion of queer sexualities- and aided, again, in consolidating the channel's 'hip,' queer- friendly brand identity.

The effects of digitisation on terrestrial broadcasting are considered throughout the project, and are explored in each chapter in relation to specific broadcasting institutions and their respective channels (and the brand identities of these channels).

For the purposes of clarity and precision, the following case studies concentrate primarily on narrative-driven examples of gay, lesbian and queer fictional television, and only tangentially on occurrences of LGB and queer content within non-fictional

television genres. Christopher Pullen among others notes the potential of reality television and its related sub-genres to represent multiple facets and varieties of gay, lesbian and queer identity, and certainly such British shows as *Big Brother* (2000) have afforded gay, lesbian and bisexual participants (and their sexualities) a highly visible public profile.[14] Both reality television and its relationship to gender and sexual identity are sprawling, complex subjects, however, and so are perhaps better addressed in greater detail in other projects which might better do justice to their complexity. By looking primarily on fictional narrative-driven instances of queer and LGB television, and excluding reality and other non-fictional narrative genres of entertainment programming, the project retains a narrowness of focus which allows for more detailed analysis of the programmes concerned, and of their relationship to their industrial and cultural contexts.

While falling within the umbrella of 'fictional narrative television,' instances of queer visibility in British soap operas will also be covered only briefly. Since queer characters and plots in mainstream UK soap operas tend to comprise only one strand of a larger (predominantly heterosexual) narrative fabric, the shows themselves could not in good conscience be termed queer or LGB-themed. I do however recognise that such plots and characterisations within British serial television drama have impacted significantly on lesbian, gay and queer media visibility in the UK in the 1990s and 2000s, and the following chapters make reference to gay, lesbian and queer instances within individual

---

[14] Christopher Pullen, 'The Household, the Basement and *The Real World*.' Eds. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn, *Understanding Reality Television*. London: Routledge, 2005.

soap operas as they occurred between 1997 and 2007, in the broader context of their industrial provenances.

As discussed above, this project represents a necessary intervention into existing queer scholarship on visibility and representation, particularly within a television context. Its ultimate goal is to broaden the parameters within which issues of queer and lesbian and gay media visibility are discussed: to move beyond purely textual analysis by identifying the multiple cultural, political and industrial determinants which have in recent years facilitated the increase in this visibility. In the process it demonstrates not only what contemporary queer, lesbian and gay programming reveals about UK culture in contemporary Britain, but also how British cultural and industrial forces work to produce (and reproduce) distinct ideologies through television production and broadcasting.

Chapter 1. Literature Review

The principal problem facing anyone seeking to create a critical account of contemporary queer television in Britain is a distinct absence of relevant scholarly material. The recent success of Channel 4's flagship drama *Queer as Folk* (1999) has led to the publication of a number of case study-driven articles, monographs and book chapters focusing on the programme, the cultural backdrop of its production and its perceived impact on the UK broadcasting climate. Writings by Sally Munt[1], Jane Arthurs[2], Peter Billingham[3] and Glyn Davis[4] among others interrogate its stylistic, thematic and ideological elements, and ultimately analyse it in contexts as diverse as the Section 28 debate (Davis), psychoanalytic theory (Munt) and urban Northern England (Billingham). However, beyond parts of Davis and Gary Needham's recent edited collection *Queer TV*, discussed in the introductory section of this thesis, there exists little more general work offering an overview of queer British television production and broadcasting in the 1990s and 2000s.[5] It is necessary, therefore, to look slightly further afield in order to gather together the sources required to begin compiling such a study, to draw upon material available on a range of related topics: queer cinema and American queer television, sexuality and the British media, the British television industry and the UK broadcasting environment, contemporary British politics and,

---

[1] Sally R. Munt, 'Shame/pride dichotomies in *Queer as Folk*.' *Textual Practice* 14:3, 2000
[2] Jane Arthurs, *Television and Sexuality: Regulation and the Politics of Taste.* Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, 2004.
[3] Peter Billingham, 'Can gay sex be politically correct? *Queer as Folk* and the geo-ideological inscription of gay sexuality.' Ed. Jonathan Bignell, Stephen Lacey, *Popular Television Drama: Critical Perspectives.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005; Peter Billingham, *Sensing the City Through Television: Urban Identities in Fiction.* Bristol: Intellect Books, 2000.
[4] Glyn Davis, *Queer as Folk*. London: BFI, 2007.
[5] Gary Needham and Glyn Davis, *Queer TV*. London: Routledge, 2009.

inevitably, queer theory. For convenience, the following literature review is divided thematically according to these topics.

<u>Queer Theory</u>

A project that focuses on queer television necessarily requires at its base a thorough definition of the term "queer": of its multiple meanings, critical lineage and political connotations. The term "queer" in this project is juxtaposed frequently with the terms "gay" and "lesbian," terms that carry entirely different meanings within the chapters that follow. I wish in this section to elucidate the differences between "queer" and "gay"/"lesbian," beginning with a brief discussion of the theoretical origins of the term "queer" and of the term "queer theory," and concluding with a necessarily related discussion of the terms "gay" and "lesbian" and their relationship to contemporary, specifically British identity politics.

Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is, in queer theory terms, a foundational text. Though never directly invoking the term "queer," Foucault challenges the concept of homosexuality as an identifying attribute and of "the homosexual" (or gay or lesbian in contemporary UK terms) as a discrete identity grouping by positing the terms and their meanings as historically and contextually specific.[6] "Homosexual" as a species classification, he argues, evolved within and alongside the legal and psychiatric discourses of late nineteenth century Western Europe. Where previously same sex sexual activity had been conceived of by law as (transgressive) behaviour, the Victorians

---

[6] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: 1*. London: Penguin, 1998

sought to reclassify it as an outward marker of identity, an ontological category. "As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes," he notes,

> Sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than a subject of them. The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality [...] It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature [...] Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[7]

The identification, punishment and 'treatment' of homosexuals by the requisite medical and legal discourses and authorities "made possible strong advance into this area of 'perversity'": moreover, such designations facilitated the metaphorical and literal segregation of such "perverts" from the general, "normal" populace.[8] A further unanticipated result of the identification of homosexuals however was what Foucault terms "the formation of a reverse discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified."[9] Appropriating the language and ideas of those who brought their legally prohibited,

---

[7] Ibid, p43.
[8] Ibid, p101.
[9] Ibid, p43.

medicalised identity into being, homosexuals themselves began to assert their desires and sexual and romantic behaviours as signifiers of an innate predisposition and state of being: homosexuality ceased to be what one *did*, but rather began to be acknowledged as what one *was*.

Arguments which posit sexual identity as innate, unchanging and as integral to the individual's self of self as ethnicity have given rise over the years to a gay identity politics which demands equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens on the basis of this identity. Conversely, queer theory and queer politics position same sex desire and sexuality as behavioural, as what Judith Butler terms "performative."[10] Adopting an anti-essentialist stance consistent with the poststructuralist criticism from which it derives, queer theory as popularised by Butler, Eve Sedgwick and others rejects the idea of gender and so of sexuality as binary, as functioning along clear-cut male/female and gay/straight lines.[11] Rather, they argue, both gender and sexuality are continually inscribed and re-inscribed upon the body of the individual through performance, the continual repetition of gendered and sexualised acts: the putting on of certain clothes, the consistent demonstration of specific sexual behaviours, and so on. Men and women are defined as such, and self-define, through performative acts; likewise, by this reasoning, queer is as queer does. "The inner truth of gender," Butler suggests, "is a fabrication"; "a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies," with the result that "genders can neither be true or false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary or stable identity."[12] So it is for sexuality.

---

[10] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1999.
[11] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990.
[12] Ibid, p174.

Butler points to drag and cross-dressing as knowingly illustrative of the "dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance."[13] Drag works in this way, she observes, by revealing "the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalised as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself- as well as its contingency."[14] Queer sexual practices have, she asserts, "the power to destabilise gender"; similarly, the destabilisation of gender and gender roles has serious implications for an individual's claim to an inherently 'gay' identity.[15] If neither male nor female genders can be said to exist as 'natural' states, then the 'naturalness' of heterosexuality as a 'normal' orientation is called into question, since its relies upon the existence of discrete gender categories. Without these categories, there can be neither distinct homo- nor heterosexual states: only individual processes of self-identification and gendered and sexualised behaviours arbitrarily identified as masculine and feminine, gay and straight. As Butler notes, in the absence of any 'natural' gender and the resultant anticipated (hetero) sexual behaviour, there can be no 'normal' or expected standard of sexual behaviour from which to deviate.

This project privileges queer theory above other theoretical strategies. However, it recognises the categories of lesbian, gay, heterosexual and bisexual where these identities are articulated by others, whether in policy, print or media representations: typically governments and government agencies, broadcasting institutions, critics and

---

[13] Ibid, p175.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid, p12.

gay and lesbian theorists and activists with vested interests in adopting for pragmatic ends what Carl Stychin terms "identitarian strategies."[16] These strategies, which hold sexual orientation to be as fixed and inherent as racial identity, have proved as Stychin notes "both resistant to challenge and strategically successful in achieving a range of goals that might be described as assimilationist," encompassing in Britain alone such legal changes as the removal of Section 28 and the introduction of civil partnership.[17] Stychin posits that the adoption of identity-based strategies by those who nonetheless recognise the intellectual value of certain aspects of queer theory only outlines the fundamental tension that exists between the two categories, "queer" and "gay," and the accompanying ideologies, "queer politics" and "gay politics." Queer, he suggests,

> Implies a more fluid and transgressive relationship to the constraints of identity and a scepticism as to the value of identity politics and the rights-based political strategies associated with it. Identity and rights become means, not of liberation, but potentially of heightened regulation of the self, which is disciplined and imprisoned into an identity which comes to be naturalised. A heterosexist, patriarchal sex/gender order remains firmly entrenched (or, indeed, becomes more so) as being gay comes to be naturalised and normalised.[18]

Queer theory, then, would seem to oppose the assimilation of "gay" individuals and culture into the mainstream, just as it would seem to oppose the essentialist assertions of "gay" as an ontological category which necessarily facilitate this assimilation. Rights-

---

[16] Carl F. Stychin, 'Being Gay,' pp104. *Government and Opposition* 40:1, 2005.

[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid, p96.

based claims have made possible the queer-positive legislative and policy gains of recent years: simply put, because it has become increasingly difficult in Western secular political climates to defend government persecution of and discrimination against a minority group simply for "being what they are." Ironically though, as Stychin speculates, stalwartly "gay" identity politics may ultimately achieve the very goal which queer theory professes to desire: the negation of "gay" and "straight" as meaningful cultural or identity categories. Whereas, he observes,

> Queer theorists may advocate the demise of fixed identity because of its regulatory power within a liberal and consumerist culture, liberal law reform and political inclusion operate to render sexual identity- in the sense of a fixed, politically mobilised identity- nugatory. That is, identity politics has been so successful that it renders itself obsolete.[19]

Within this project, and particularly in chapters 2 and 4 (which deal respectively with the political and cultural determinants of increased gay and LGBT visibility since the mid 1990s, and with representations of "queerness" versus "homosexuality" on the BBC) the concept of assimilation is crucial. In this context, the term refers specifically to the recent legal and social integration of gays and lesbians, though not queers, into the British cultural mainstream- integration frequently achieved via appeals to the same identitarian logic that Stychin describes. The concept of assimilation as it pertains to gays and lesbians in contemporary Britain is explored more fully in the following section.

---

[19] Ibid, pp106-7.

Politics

Research into broadcast scheduling and other decisions relating to the creation of overall channel cohesion on terrestrial television cannot be ignored in any consideration of recent queer programming. The political and cultural climate which generated this programming, however, is in itself significant. Though television like all media can be said to impact upon and so to an extent shape the culture that produced it, this culture undeniably impacts upon the television product itself, as well as upon those broadcasting executives who commissioned and/or produced it. The relationship between the television industry and the wider cultural environment is most likely reciprocal, symbiotic. Some analysis of the political dimensions of this culture, therefore, is unavoidable- not least because of the many changes to queer-specific policy and legislation that have taken place in Britain since the 1997 Labour election victory.

In *Governing Sexuality*, Carl Stychin analyses sexuality, and particularly gay, lesbian and queer sexuality in contemporary Britain in relation to citizenship and neoliberalism's emphasis on rights and responsibilities.[20] Noting again the many instances of gay and lesbian-specific law reform that occurred under New Labour, he connects Blair's Third Way social and economic policy with an increase in the civil rights afforded lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Britons in the last decade, and suggests a causal relationship between the two. He identifies a number of "key concepts" that informed the Third Way inflected New Labour ideology, and which impacted upon the

---

[20] Carl F. Stychin, *Governing Sexuality: The Changing Politics of Sexuality and Law Reform.* Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2003.

government's approach to "governing" sexuality: "the idea of social inclusion,"

encompassing the social inclusion of non-heterosexuals; "the linking of rights and

responsibilities," specifically "the enjoyment of rights as being conditioned upon the

acceptance of responsibilities as citizens"; "the role of community as performing a key

function of inculcating the values of citizenship, social inclusion, and the social control

of deviant behaviour"; the role of family in "producing responsible, active new citizens";

"the importance of consensus within One Nation"; and finally, "a faith in managerialism

and law," which insists that "social problems can be solved, if we think about them

carefully enough and come up with strategies to manage them and encourage the

individual to manage herself."[21] These concepts combine to create a strong incentive for

all individual citizens, gay and lesbian or not, to contribute to an imagined national

community: economically, by participating in those activities vital to the maintenance of

a free market (working, buying and otherwise consuming goods and services) and

socially, by not making trouble for fellow citizens, or otherwise exhibiting outward signs

of "deviance." Gays and lesbians, by this logic, are assimilated into mainstream society

for entirely pragmatic ends. If sexual minorities are no longer stigmatised, they are free

to make the requisite social and economic contributions. Their integration into the

national community, in short, is worth more to the government, and to the British

economy, than their exclusion.

Stychin sees their integration as accomplished through a variety of legal means, all of

which afford them the rights which might facilitate their assuming greater social and

economic responsibilities. He points to the alteration of family and adoption laws, the

---

[21] Ibid, pp28-31.

abolition of Section 28 and the lowering of the age of consent as illustrations. Matthew Waites draws similar conclusions in reference to the latter two examples.[22] Elsewhere, Stychin adds to the list recent LGBT-positive changes to employment legislation, and specifically Blair's commitment in October 1997 to the terms of the Amsterdam Treaty, which compelled its signatories to combat discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and, crucially, sexual orientation.[23] This, he suggests, proved especially important to gay and lesbian Britons' abilities to contribute to the community, since it provided a legal basis for the challenging of inequality in the workplace. Its implementation allowed them access, at least in theory, to every facet of commerce and industry. Their involvement, and subsequent productivity levels, could only increase as a result.

John D'Emilio's work explores similar territory, albeit within an American rather than a British framework.[24] Drawing upon Foucault's conceptions of sexual identity as historically contingent, and using late nineteenth and early to mid twentieth century America as his case-study, D'Emilio posits "the homosexual" (in the Foucauldian sense) as a direct result of a burgeoning capitalist economy. Homosexuality as it is now understood, he argues, is linked inextricably to the operations of the free market. Gay men and lesbians,

---

[22] Matthew Waites, 'Regulation of Sexuality: Age of Consent, Section 28 and Sex Education.' *Parliamentary Affairs* 54:3, 2001.

[23] Carl F. Stychin, 'A Queer Nation By Rights: European Integration, Sexual Identity Politics and the Discourse of Rights.' Eds. Kate Chedgzoy, Emma Francis, Murray Pratt, *In A Queer Place: Sexuality and Belonging in British and European Contexts*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002.

[24] John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

have not always existed. Instead, they are a product of history, and have come into

existence in a specific historical era. Their emergence is associated with the relations of

capitalism- more specifically, its free labour system- that has allowed large numbers of

men and women in the late twentieth century to call themselves gay, to see themselves as

part of a community of similar men and women, and to organise politically on the basis

of that identity.[25]

The shift in emphasis from "household family-based economy" to one in which the

majority of production took place away from the home brought the (male) individual to

regard the non-work-space, and especially the family, as "the setting for a 'personal life,'

sharply distinguished and disconnected from the public world of work and

production."[26] The result: that the same individual was freed, economically if not always

legally, to pursue his own pleasures, up to and including same-sex sexual relationships.

Capitalism, he suggests, has effectively "created conditions that allow some men and

women to organize a personal life around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own

sex."[27] Julie Matthaei likewise claims that "advanced capitalism constructs an

individuated, consumption-orientated, self-seeking person"[28]: a claim borne out in

advanced capitalist twentieth century Britain by the relative successes of the market-

driven New Labour party at the polls in 1997. Within this project, D'Emilio's analysis of

the interrelatedness of capitalism and gay and lesbian identity tally perfectly

complements Stychin's. The same individualist ethos that informed Blair's Third Way

---

[25] John D'Emilio, 'Capitalism and Gay Identity,' p102. Eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality.* New York : Monthly Review Press, 1983.
[26] Ibid., p103.
[27] Ibid, p104.
[28] Julie Matthaei, 'The Sexual Division of Labour, Sexuality and Lesbian/Gay Liberation, p136. Eds. Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed, *Homoeconomics: Capitalism, Community and Lesbian and Gay Life.* London: Routledge, 1997.

caused gay identity, and ultimately the LGBT consumer and the 'pink pound,' to come
into being. Following his reasoning, the free market values that demanded that New
Labour assimilate gay Britons among other minority groups into mainstream society
were the very thing that caused that particular minority group to exist in the first place.

Of further benefit to gay and lesbian individuals operating within neoliberalism, and
directly impacting upon onscreen representations of gay, lesbian (as distinct from
queer) sexualities, is what Ulrich Beck and others have termed "cosmopolitanism." The
term "cosmopolitan" as Ulrich Beck defines it refers to an environment in which a
number of outlooks and modes of living may coexist, or to an individual capable of
understanding and processing these potentially contradictory modes of living: one who
allows for "the clash of cultures and rationalities within [his or her] own life, for the
presence of "'the *internalised* other'"[29]. The "cosmopolitan perspective," for him, is

> An alternative imagination, an imagination of alternative ways of life and rationalities,
> which include the otherness of others. It puts the negotiation of contradictory cultural
> experiences into the centre of activities: in the political, the economic, the scientific, and
> the social.[30]

Cosmopolitanism in the contemporary British context is a product of a neoliberal
political economy which allows for the accommodation of "others," not least non-
heterosexuals. To be cosmopolitan is to accept the "alternative ways of life" to which

---

[29] Ulrich Beck, 'The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies,' p18. *Theory, Culture and Society* 19: 1-2,
2002. For further discussion of cosmopolitanism and its relationship to queer communities, see also: Eds.
Pheng Cheng and Bruce Robbins, *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation. Minneapolis:
University of Minnesota Press*, 1998.
[30] Ibid.

Beck refers, up to and including accepting the presence of these alternatives within the broadcast media. Moreover, as Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs observe, the practice of cosmopolitanism entails not only "a particular attitude towards difference" but "access to a particular form of knowledge" that allows one to "appropriate and to know the other and generate authority from this knowing."[31] With this in mind, it is not illogical to speculate that those broadcasters responsible for the gay, lesbian and queer-themed programming falling within the scope of this research project might well have produced and commissioned this programming not only to attract an increased (and increasingly empowered) gay and lesbian populace, but in the spirit of appealing to cosmopolitan-identified heterosexuals eager to embrace what Beck calls "the otherness of others."[32] This argument is only lent weight by Binnie and Skeggs' locating of cosmopolitanism within specifically urban spaces, and their suggestion that cosmopolitan practices occur largely within the affluent and the upwardly-mobile: these groups being, after all, among the most desirable to broadcasters and their advertisers. As discussed in some detail in Chapter 3, Channel 4 seeks explicitly to target young, cosmopolitan audiences through its programming, and especially through such shows as *Queer as Folk* and *Skins*. However, as Chapters 4 and 5 suggest, both the BBC and ITV have also sought to capitalise on the "cosmopolitan perspectives" of heterosexual audiences through the deployment of gay, lesbian and queer themed shows like *Bad Girls* and *The State Within*- shows intended to appeal not only to a LGBT or queer niche market, but to a much larger audience of liberal minded, cosmopolitan heterosexuals.

---

[31] Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs, 'Cosmopolitan knowledge and the production and consumption of sexualised space: Manchester's gay village,' p42. *The Sociological Review* 52:1, 2004.
[32] Beck, 'The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies,' p36.

Cinema and (American) Television

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the absence of any existing substantial critical framework for the consideration of British gay, lesbian and queer *television*, Robin Griffiths observes that "little formative critical work exists for considering the specificities of queer cinema from within a British context."[33] Stephen Bourne's study of British gay and lesbian film before 1971 provides a historical perspective on the subject, while Richard Dyer's *The Matter of Images* seeks to deal with "the cultural representations of certain groupings" including queers and other sexual minorities, with these "cultural representations" encompassing those images produced within both past and then-contemporary British visual and cinematic cultures.[34] However, while research on British queer and LGBT film and television is relatively scarce, material focusing on LGBT and queer US-produced film and television proliferates, in keeping with the American dominance of both the worldwide box office and the global television export trade.[35] Two texts in particular have proven useful to this project.

In *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Alexander Doty seeks to "queer" American popular culture, to locate the queerness that informs ostensibly heterocentric, if not altogether heterosexist film and television. Doty follows queer theory in rejecting ideas of gender and sexuality as discrete binary categorisations, and in extending this rejection to his

---

[33] Robin Griffiths, 'Queer Britannia- a century of *sin*ema,' p3. Ed. Robin Griffiths, *British Queer Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2006.

[34] Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*, p6. London: Routledge, 1993.

[35] For other texts dealing with queer cinema and television in an American context, see among others: James R. Keller, *Queer (Un)Friendly Film and Television*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002; Ed. Ellie Hanson, *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999; Ed. Tamsin Wilton, *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*. London: Routledge, 1995; Eds. Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty, *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995.

analysis of mainstream entertainment, looking at films as successful as *Thelma and Louise* (1991), *Red River* (1948) and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), and shows as mainstream as *Laverne and Shirley* (ABC, 1976-83) and *The Golden Girls* (NBC, 1985-92). His arguments are similarly indebted to Michel de Certeau's notion of reading (or in this case, watching) as an active process through which the meaning of a given text is generated, of the experience of spectatorship as textual "poaching."[36] For Doty, no film or television programme can accurately be termed 'gay,' just as none can be regarded as exclusively 'straight.' Rather he suggests, "within cultural production and reception, queer erotics are already part of culture's erotic centre, both as a necessary construct by which to define the heterosexual and the straight (as "not queer"), and as a position that can be occupied in various ways by otherwise heterosexual and straight-identifying people."[37] The notion of queerness as a measure against which heterosexuality defines itself exerts a strong influence on the following chapters, which posit queerness and queer characterisations within UK television programmes as a (negative) standard against which assimilated homosexuality and discrete gay and lesbian identities are defined.

Doty's argument that overt queerness in film and television, in the form of an occasional gay or lesbian character or obviously queer interaction, frequently serves to reinforce the apparent heterosexuality of the primary characters is mirrored in Ron Becker's *Gay TV and Straight America*. Reading queer shows, characters and plotlines on network television during the 1990s in the context of America's cultural and political climate,

---

[36] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.
[37] Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, p3. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Becker coins the term "straight panic" to refer to the response within mainstream entertainment to queer issues and the demands of an increasingly polysexual world.[38] Straight panic, as Becker defines it, "refers to the growing anxiety of a heterosexual culture and straight individuals confronting [a] shifting social landscape where categories of sexual identity were repeatedly scrutinised and traditional moral hierarchies regulating sexuality were challenged."[39] In the context of the contemporary American sitcoms on which he focuses, this anxiety plays out most frequently in moments of mistaken identity, or rather mistaken *sexual* identity, wherein a principal heterosexual character is imagined to be gay by a third party, with hilarious consequences. Queer material comes to be "narrativised" into the mainstream, a process that Becker regards with both optimism and suspicion.[40] This kind of visibility, he notes, is something of a double-edged sword: on the one hand providing an increased and much-needed gay and lesbian presence on US television but, on the other, providing producers with the opportunity to safely distance their main characters from this presence, and so allowing them to quell "the fears stirred up by the shifting politics of sexual identity and social difference."[41]

Doty largely confines his study to textual analysis, making few links between the films and television programmes he identifies as queer and the cultural and industrial climates from which they emerged. Becker however considers the impact of certain industrial and cultural determinants on queer television production in present-day America. He posits a relationship between those high-profile legislative changes and

---

[38] Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America*, p4. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid, p212.
[41] Ibid.

prominent political events that occurred in the US in the 1990s and an increase in

queer-themed television broadcast, pointing to the "don't ask, don't tell"/gays in the

military debate, the 1996 institution of the Defence of Marriage Act and the attempted

impeachment of Bill Clinton as key influences. He also points to other shifts in the US

cultural landscape as instrumental in precipitating greater queer media visibility, in

particular the murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998 and the subsequent calls for the

implementation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender-specific hate crimes

legislation. In this respect, Becker's work provides a useful model for my own research,

this project being concerned in part with establishing a correlation between gay, lesbian

and queer-specific alterations to British law in recent years (the abolition of Section 28,

the lowering of the age of consent, the creation of the Civil Partnership Act, and so on)

and an increased gay, lesbian and queer presence on terrestrial television. His analysis

of the financial imperatives which inform the production and commissioning decisions

of the American commercial networks, moreover, are helpful to my own considerations

of the impact of commercial viability on the broadcast of gay, lesbian and queer

television in the UK, on the commercially-funded channels as well as the public service-

oriented BBC.

Sexuality and the Media

Recent alterations in representations of sexuality in the British media, encompassing

television as well as film, the print press and the internet, are similarly well-

documented. Brian McNair's *Striptease Culture* examines the transformation in media

portrayals of sexuality in 1990s British and American culture, explicitly linking what its

sub-title terms "the democratisation of desire" with the advancement of neoliberalism, particularly in Britain, and the greater spending power wielded by women and sexual minorities. Citing studies which estimate the UK gay community to be worth some £10 billion in disposable income as of 2000, McNair argues that "the economic power of homosexuals in the 1980s and 1990s, like that of women in the 1960s, encouraged capitalist economies to make space for a gay public in the cultural marketplace": television programming constituting, in this instance, one sector of this marketplace.[42] For him, the "democratisation of desire" manifests through, among other things, increased visibility for gays, lesbians and queers in television, cinema and the arts. Aligning himself somewhat with queer theory's repudiation of any 'natural' human sexuality, he acknowledges this increase as indicative of the media's engagement with "a world of plural sexualities and polymorphous perversities."[43] Like Becker, he places the apparently wider acceptability of gay, lesbian and queer-themed television, and of gays, lesbians and queers in the mainstream media within the context of new rights and protections afforded individual gays and lesbians by recent legal and political changes in the UK and the USA. He also points to the coming-out of several high-profile public figures (Tory MP Michael Portillo, singer George Michael, Boyzone band member Stephen Gately) as contributing to a more sexually-diverse cultural climate, one in which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender representations on screen might be well received.

---

[42] Brian McNair, *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratisation of Desire*, p40. London: Routledge, 2002.
[43] Ibid, p4.

McNair's response to the effect of consumer capitalism on LGBT and queer visibility in the UK is almost overwhelmingly positive throughout. Acknowledging anti-capitalist critiques (to which I wish to return shortly), he refutes what he terms "the assumption that commercialisation (or commodification) is of itself a Very Bad Thing, incompatible with progressive social change."[44] Instead, he observes: "gay chic, designer dykes, lipstick lesbians- all mean that the homosexual can no longer be an outsider or a rebel, but is backed into mere consumerism like the rest of us."[45] The commercialisation of (non-hetero) sexuality is, by his reckoning, a good thing for the purposes of engendering an increased and increasingly diverse LGBT and queer media presence: the greater commercial viability of the LGBT community equating to greater economic clout in the media market, and so, at least in theory, gays and lesbians themselves wielding greater authority over media representations of non-hetero sexuality.

McNair's celebration of the sexually liberatory potential of consumer capitalism, however, overlooks one significant point- namely that the commodification and assimilation of gays and lesbians in contemporary Britain excludes some, even as it allows for the social inclusion of others, specifically those gays and lesbians with the economic means to redistribute their pink pound. Rosemary Hennessy's *Profit and Pleasure* argues for this very position, resisting any reading of the commodification of sexual identity as a change for the better, or as progress. She concedes that "cultural visibility can prepare the ground for gay civil rights protection," and that "affirmative images of lesbians and gays in the mainstream media can be empowering for those of us

---

[44] Ibid, p144-5.
[45] Ibid.

who have lived most of our lives with no validation from the dominant culture."[46]

However, where McNair regards consumer capitalism as a levelling force capable of creating an even, standardised playing field for queers, gays, lesbians and straights alike, Hennessy's more Marxist position leads her to question the motives of media producers in promoting greater queer visibility in recent years, and to suggest that the kind of visibility on offer may ultimately prove less beneficial to gay, lesbian and queer communities than might at first be imagined. Like all entertainment industries, including television, she notes, the movie industry "goes where the money is, and so far [...] "gay" is becoming a warmer if not a hot commodity."[47] She returns consistently to the question of "who profits from these new markets?"[48] In answer, she examines both the middle-class gays and lesbians benefiting from increased media visibility, McNair's "designer dykes and lipstick lesbians," and those "less glamorous" and less affluent gay, lesbian and queer individuals who, though largely unrepresented by the mainstream media, remain resolutely non-heterosexual in spite of their exclusion from this mainstream and their lack of material resources.[49] Unlike McNair, she is critical of much queer theory, and in particular of Judith Butler, citing Butler's side-stepping of the economics and "material of sexuality that are politically important to queer theory and politics."[50] Its is, she argues, "the social order- the distribution of wealth, resources and power- which is at stake in the struggle over meanings," especially the meanings generated by queer media representations: a point that, in championing the positive

---

[46] Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, p111. London: Routledge, 2002.
[47] Ibid, p135.
[48] Ibid, p141.
[49] Ibid, p143.
[50] Ibid, p129.

effects of increased queer cultural visibility, McNair consistently understates.[51] The

following chapters (and Chapters 2 and 4 in particular) assert that the integration of

affluent, consuming, commodified gays and lesbians into the British cultural

mainstream, and the concomitant social exclusion of those who fail to fit this mould,

have helped propagate other dichotomies, contrasting good (consuming) gays with bad,

respectable homosexuals with unreconstructed queers. Televisual representations of

non-heterosexual themes and characters, I suggest, have followed suit, dividing their

LGBT and queer representations and characterisations into good and bad, sheep and

goats, often for commercial ends. As Hennessy notes, media industries pitch their

products "where the money is." "Where the money is," in the contemporary British

media context, equates to affluent heterosexual audiences and assimilated, commodified

gays and lesbians in possession of the desirable pink pound- both of whom have, as

discussed in the following chapters, a vested interest in television's perpetuation of such

a dichotomy.

Others have argued, like Hennessy, against uncritical celebration of the increased

visibility of a certain type of gay/lesbian image, and against the tendency of

poststructuralist, postfeminist and queer theory-inflected cultural criticism to

unreflectively celebrate this increased visibility. Postfeminism's embrace of certain

television programmes, and the critical responses this embrace engendered, roughly

parallel the positions outlined by McNair and Hennessy, albeit in the context of gender

and sexuality rather than sexuality alone. Certain (predominantly US) shows deemed

postfeminist in critical circles are interrogated within the main body of this project in

---

[51] Ibid.

relation to the brand identities of the UK channels on which they first appeared, particularly in Chapter 3. Some discussion of the term and its connotations is therefore desirable.

Amanda D. Lotz defines postfeminist cultural texts as those that

> deconstruct binary categories of gender and sexuality, instead viewing these categories as flexible and indistinct. Here the figures of transgendered, transsexual and bisexual individuals illustrate the way culturally created categories including woman, man, heterosexual, homosexual and homosexual can be contested.[52]

Contemporary media representations of this category flexibility, though, have not been unproblematic. Critics from Tania Modleski to Angela McRobbie have lambasted "postfeminist" cinema and television for its perceived detachment from the material economic and social realities of feminism and female identity within what remains a largely patriarchal cultural.[53] Others have attacked specific popular films and programmes for their postfeminist failings. Rachel Moseley and Jacinta Read see conflict and ambiguity in *Ally McBeal*'s (1997) synthesis of high fashion and traditional 'feminine' aesthetics and multiple assertions of female power, in its negotiation of "the relationship between feminism (realism) and femininity (fantasy)."[54] Jane Arthurs points to a similar tension in *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), highlighting the show's

---

[52] Amanda D. Lotz, 'Postfeminist Television Criticism: Rehabilitating Critical Terms and Identifying Postfeminist Attributes,' p116. *Feminist Media Studies* 1:1, 2001.
[53] Angela McRobbie, 'Notes on Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime.' Ed. Anita Harris, *All about the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity*. London: Routledge, 2004.
[54] Rachel Mosely and Jacinta Read, 'Having it *Ally*: Popular Television (Post-) Feminism,' p238. *Feminist Media Studies* 2:2, 2002.

complex relationship with consumer culture, its sex and shopping motifs. Its stylistic

features, she observes, "contribute to the cultural hegemony of the incorporated

resistance of the bourgeois bohemians"; its "culture of femininity provides an alternative

to heterosexual dependence but its recurring promise of a shameless utopia of fulfilled

desire always ends in disappointment for the cycle of consumption to begin again next

week."[55] Her conclusion tempers the optimism of McNair with the materialist concerns

of Hennessy, but ultimately deems the show a knowing commentary on, rather than an

unreflective and cheerleading product of the "feminist" consumer capitalism it depicts.

"The fragmentation of the television market," she asserts,

> has allowed a sexually explicit and critical feminist discourse into television comedy,
>
> albeit within the parameters of a consumer culture and the limitations this imposes. This
>
> is a welcome innovation in women's representation on television in that it assumes and
>
> promotes women's right to sexual pleasure and validates women's friendship and culture
>
> […] The programme offers evidence of the deleterious effects of economic liberalism in a
>
> society where moral and religious values are in decline, with no alternative to the
>
> hedonistic and selfish values of capitalism.[56]

Arthurs' *Television and Sexuality* likewise examines in detail the results of neoliberal

economic policy in the UK on British television depictions of sexuality, and the ongoing

impact of other policy and regulation decisions on on-screen sexual behaviour. Looking

in detail at *Queer as Folk* in addition to other programmes broadcast on terrestrial

television in recent years, the book aims to interrogate "how sexuality has been

---

[55] Jane Arthurs, '*Sex and the City* and Consumer Culture: Remediating Postfeminist Drama,' p88. *Feminist Media Studies* 3:1, 2003.
[56] Ibid, pp95-6.

represented on television":[57] sexuality here encompassing queerness, as well as prostitution, postfeminist sex and contemporary media manifestations of heterosexual masculinity. Arthurs takes pains to emphasise the role of broadcasting regulations and guidelines in governing television sexuality. A section of the text entitled 'Sexual Citizenship in the Digital Age' is given over to discussion of the effects of the Independent Television Commission and latterly Ofcom in regulating on-screen sexuality, of the role played by individual channel remits in shaping (particularly queer) programme content, and of the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board and the ratings system in influencing the commissioning process. Like McNair, she posits a link between the (specifically New Labour) government pursuit of a free market ideology and the increase in queer visibility on British screens, although she also stresses the lack of diversity in the queer representations offered by mainstream television, pointing to a tendency on the part of broadcasters to cast lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender characters (certainly before *Queer as Folk*, which she regards as a watershed event in UK television history) in socially responsible or issue-driven roles. Most interestingly, she connects the various representations of sexuality included in her study to the brand identities established by individual UK channels. Both the *types* of sexuality on show, she suggests, and the level of explicitness deemed acceptable and unlikely to offend depends very much on its broadcasting context, on the channel on which it is shown: on whether, for example, a channel markets itself as cutting-edge and risk-taking (as with Channel 4) or as more conservative (as is the case with BBC1).

---

[57] Jane Arthurs, *Television and Sexuality*: *Regulation and the Politics of Taste*, p1. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, 2004.

Branding and Broadcasting in the UK

The notion of brand identity as it applies to British terrestrial television corporations is highly important to any understanding of the commissioning, production and broadcasting processes. It provides a portion of the answer to the questions of how and why specific shows appear on certain channels at certain times, why certain types and genres of shows appear more frequently in the schedules than others and why, as is particularly relevant to this project, the presence of queer content may sometimes be deemed acceptable for audiences, and at other times offensive.

In both her book-length institutional study of the BBC and her shorter account of Channel Four's marketing strategies in the digital era, Georgina Born addresses television brand identity and its effect on production and broadcasting decisions.[58] Channel Four, she suggests, has in recent years balanced its public service obligations and commercial needs by specifically targeting youth (16-34) markets in its programming. She posits two assumptions on the part of Channel Four about these younger viewers: first, that they "desire above all entertainment programming," and second, that for them, "'minorities' are no longer meaningful social categories."[59] These hypotheses are highly significant in terms of its programme content, and especially its queer programme content. If young audiences no longer regard queerness as a minority status or category but rather see it as having been assimilated into the fabric of mainstream society, then queerness incorporated into shows broadcast on C4 or its

[58] Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC.* London: Secker & Warburg, 2004; Georgina Born, 'Strategy, positioning and projection in digital television: Channel 4 and the commercialisation of public service broadcasting in the UK.' *Media, Culture & Society*, 25:6, 2003.
[59] Ibid, pp793-4.

digital subsidiary channel E4 (like the youth-oriented *Skins*, *As If* and *Sugar Rush*) is unlikely to raise eyebrows or elicit complaints. So, the channel is able to meet the demands of its public service remit, which insists that it "[appeal] to the tastes and interest of a *culturally diverse* society" [italics mine] while still attracting viewers.[60] Moreover, she observes, young viewers are particularly desirable in the eyes of advertisers, meaning that Channel Four's policy of commissioning shows specifically designed to appeal to 16-34s makes sound financial sense, as well as having potentially very positive implications for queer visibility on British screens.

Her examination of the BBC similarly seeks, among other things, to assess the relationship between television corporate brand identity, the way the BBC as an institution is marketed to audiences and its necessary adherence to the terms of its own public service remit, which dictates that the Corporation "serve the public interest" and "[represent] the UK, its nations, regions and communities."[61] This relationship, as she notes, is best articulated through the Corporation's production choices, its development of series and other television projects that reinforce or diverge from the public image it endeavours to convey. Born terms the tensions motivating programme-making and – commissioning within the organisation "the paradox," and outlines it thusly:

> [the BBC] has to be popular, and it has to *demonstrate* its popularity. The recognised conduit for such demonstration is the ratings game. But the BBC cannot stop at this; competitive ratings are necessary but not sufficient to justify the licence fee. The BBC must provide a range and diversity of programming. It must offer mass-appeal

---

[60] *Communications Act 2003* (c.21).
[61] BBC Royal Charter 2006.

programmes, but it must also serve minority audiences and those unattractive to

advertisers, who are under-served by commercial television. It must engage in creative

risk and innovation. It must provide those genres that are currently out of favour but

have value in themselves or may be about to become popular. The BBC, in other words,

has to achieve what commercial broadcasters do and much more.[62]

She also focuses a great deal of attention on those brand identity features distinguishing

BBC1, which airs mostly mainstream entertainment and factual programmes, and BBC2,

which frequently functions as a more highbrow and culturally diverse companion piece

to the original channel, and so has tended to broadcast the bulk of the BBC's overall

queer content. Her recognition that different brand identities exist even within a single

broadcasting organisation has been helpful in guiding my own research towards a

similar acknowledgement. Since the onset of digitisation, many British subsidiary

channels (E4, BBCs3 and 4, Five Life, and so on) have sought to establish brand

identities distinct from those of their parent channels, with queer programming often

appearing first on the more cutting-edge and progressive of these subsidiaries. For

contemporary British gay, lesbian and queer television to be comprehensively

investigated, individual examples of gay, lesbian and queer programming must be

understood as functioning as part of a digital broadcasting landscape, within which

channel brand identity more often than not determines channel content.

Scheduling also plays a role in determining (in this case, gay, lesbian and queer)

programme content, as the case studies contained within this project suggest. Work on

---

[62] Born, *Uncertain Vision*, p54.

British television schedules and programming by John Ellis and Charlotte Brunsdon has linked scheduling to channel brand identity. Ellis terms scheduling "the architecture" of television, the very thing which defines "the edifice which gives meaning to each programme-block"; it "defines the basic choices which define a television broadcast service."[63] Scheduling, he asserts, is enormously important in establishing a broadcaster's brand identity because this brand identity "lies in the overall character of programmes, their placing in a recognised pattern incarnating both viewing habits and judgements of 'fitness for [audience] purpose.'"[64] Brunsdon concurs. With reference to BBC2 and its 1990s emphasis under controller Jane Root on cooking, home improvement, gardening and other "lifestyle" programmes, she observes that a proliferation of certain kinds of programmes may well lead to the establishment of a certain kind of brand identity for that channel, at least within specific timeslots.[65] So BBC2 has come to be associated, at least on weekday evenings, with leisure and lifestyle broadcasting. So, its public service broadcasting remit aside, Channel 4 is now synonymous with youth and minority programming.[66]

The above sources, when collated, provide a solid theoretical foundation from which to begin research into queer television in a contemporary British context. From queer theory and its opponents, the project derives a sense both of the nature of the term "queer" and its relation to "gay" and "lesbian" identity politics, as well as the place of

---

[63] John Ellis, 'Scheduling: The Last Creative Act in Television?' p25. *Media, Culture and Society* 22:1, 2000.
[64] Ibid, p36.
[65] Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Lifestyling Britain: The 8-9 Slot on British Television.' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6:5, 2003.
[66] For further work on branding and television brand identity, see also among others: Catherine Johnson, 'Telebranding in TVIII: The Network as Brand and the Programme as Brand.' *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 5:1, 2007, and Paul Grainge, '*Lost* Logos: Channel 4 and the Branding of American Event Television' (unpublished article).

both within the current political climate. Research into sexuality and British government policy provides insight into the legislative workings of the culture out of which the lesbian, gay and queer programming in question emerges, while work that seeks to draw correlations between the British and American cultural and political climates and their media output effectively bridges the critical-theoretical gap between media and culture, providing models of such from which this project might draw. Finally, work on television branding and channel brand identity outlines the role played by certain types of queer programming in establishing specific images for individual broadcasters, and in attracting specific audience demographics: demographics with attitudes and desires made attractive to these broadcasters in part by changes in policy and legislation that drew homosexuality (if not queerness) into the British cultural mainstream. The relationship of any kind of broadcasting to its wider cultural environment is invariably complex and multifaceted, and inevitably mediated through broadcasting institutions with their own interests, agendas and constraints. With the above literature in mind, however, I hope through this project to more critically examine available representations of homosexuality, lesbianism and queerness on British television in the decade following the New Labour election, to interrogate the negotiation of alternative sexualities by UK broadcasters and to more fully determine the cultural, political and industrial determinants of the assimilation of (certain) alternative sexualities into the cultural mainstream.

Chapter 2. Queer Visibility in the UK, 1997-2007: Some Cultural and Political Determinants

The markedly increased gay, lesbian and queer presence on British terrestrial television since 1997 is a product of multiple determinants. Alongside what Brian McNair describes as a more general "sexualisation of culture," the assimilation of gays and lesbians into the British cultural mainstream has contributed enormously to the rise in LGBT and queer visibility on screen.[1] Alterations to government policy on sexuality and queer identity between 1997 and 2007 have played a substantial role in furthering this assimilation. Similarly alterations in policy and approach to broadcasting in the UK in the same period, encompassing the Blair governments' response to technological development and the onset of digitisation, have opened up space for an increased queer and LGBT presence on terrestrial television. This chapter addresses these determinants of lesbian, gay and queer visibility in British programming, exploring their development and place within the Blair government's overall policy stance, and looks to their impact upon television programme-making and content, as detailed more exhaustively in the chapters that follow.

The policy changes pertaining to sexual orientation were many. Over the course of Blair's decade in office, more than nine Acts and regulations of note were passed that actively promoted the assimilation of gay, lesbian and bisexual Britons into mainstream

---

[1] Brian McNair, *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratisation of Desire*, p7 London: Routledge, 2002. It should be noted that McNair regards this "sexualisation" as itself the result of a multiplicity of determinants, including recent alterations to queer policy and legislation within the UK, the USA and the EU.

society via amendments to (among others) employment, family and criminal law. The often extensive media coverage that accompanied these amendments was equally important in terms of their impact on queer visibility. Whether positive or negative, such coverage placed gay rights, LGBT and queer citizens and their antagonists very much in the spotlight. This in turn resulted in gay, lesbian and queer issues and the programming which raised them being considered increasingly desirable by broadcasters, if only in terms of the likelihood that the media-generated controversy surrounding them would serve as a lure to attract large audiences interested in learning more. For this reason, the media response to the legislative changes affecting LGBT and queer lives will be examined alongside the changes themselves, and its effects considered here and in subsequent chapters.

Both sets of determinants, the changes to policy on sexual orientation and on broadcasting and communications, came about primarily as a result of the Blair government's commitment to a centrist ideological position. This position, termed the Third Way by the Labour Party in its 1996 manifesto, was enormously influential in determining all aspects of British government policy in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The section below briefly summarises the details of the Third Way.

Social exclusion and the Third Way

New Labour, the Party's manifesto promised in 1997, was to be "a radical government […], a party of ideas and ideals, but not of outdated ideology," with 'modernisation' and

a commitment to "progress and justice" at its heart.[2] For Blair and his government, this 'modernisation' entailed the implementation of a Third Way political philosophy placing equal emphasis on both the rights accorded to and the responsibilities incumbent upon individual citizens. Broadly, Blair's Third Way synthesised neoliberal conceptions of free market capitalism with social democratic ideas of justice and equality. It aimed to "[promote] and [reconcile] the four values which are essential to a just society [...] - equal worth, opportunity for all, responsibility and community."[3] Some critics, like Michael Freeden, detected a strong Conservative ethic embedded within the New Labour Third Way ideology, particularly concerning the party's attitude to the welfare state. "Individual virtue," as he saw it, was "tantamount to not being a nuisance to others, whether in terms of demanding money, eliciting effort or challenging values"[4]. Stuart Hall went further, tracing what he termed "the remoralisation of the work ethic, and the restoration of that discredited and obscene Victorian utilitarian distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor"[5]. Certainly, by Blair's reasoning, an individual's reliance on for example the benefits system constituted a shirking of the "responsibilities" so pivotal to the establishment of a strong British economy: indeed, he identifies "unemployment benefits [...] often paid without strong reciprocal obligations" as among the failings of previous governments[6]. The contribution of every individual to economic growth, in part via what Freeden terms "a duty to work" was regarded as

---

[2] Labour Party manifesto 1997
http://www.bbc.co.uk/election97/background/parties/manlab/labman.html [16/03/07].
[3] Tony Blair, 'The Third Way: New Politics for a New Century,' pp29-31. Eds. Andrew Chadwick and Andrew Hefferman , *The New Labour Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.
[4] Michael Freeden, 'The Ideology of New Labour,' p45. *The New Labour Reader*.
[5] Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Nowhere Show,' p86. *The New Labour Reader*.
[6] Tony Blair, 'The Third Way: New Politics for a New Century,' p30.

pivotal to New Labour's project of 'modernisation.'[7] It was deemed essential, therefore, that as many marginalised groups and individuals (or rather, in Freeden's terms, potential employees) as possible were assimilated into 'mainstream' British society, and therefore into the UK's workforce. Social disparities were to be redressed for economic ends, with "opportunity for all" provided on the understanding that the opportunity to work be seized by all to whom it was offered.

The efficacy of the Blair government's Third Way position therefore depended on the social integration of previously excluded groups into an imagined cultural mainstream. Once integrated into this mainstream these groups were, at least in theory, afforded equality of access to education, employment and other public services, that would in turn allow them to make the required economic and social contributions. Simon Prideaux notes that, "the politics of the 'third way' [could] only be successfully applied if a sense of 'community' throughout civil society [was] effectively revived."[8] An increase in each individual's contribution to this "civil society" could only be made if commensurate increases in access were also forthcoming. Access to and inclusion within strong, supportive family networks were also regarded by Blair and his government as crucial to the cultivation of healthy, productive British citizens.

The social exclusion of non-heterosexual Britons, then, whether through legislation that impeded their progress in the formation of partnerships and families or through employment-based discrimination that limited their participation in the economic life of

---

[7] Michael Freeden, 'The Ideology of New Labour,' p46.
[8] Simon Prideaux, *Not So New Labour: A Sociological Critique of New Labour's Policy and Practice*, p111. Bristol: Policy Press, 2005.

the nation, was antithetical to the overall New Labour project. To this end, as Janet Newman observes, the Blair government once installed in office publicly began to promote an image of a Britain "in which old prejudices [...] had been overcome, and which was characterised by mutual understanding and tolerance."[9] Rather than "celebrating diversity," though, Blair's New Labour emphasised the fundamental similarities of British citizens, attempting to institute what Newman calls "a homogenous, consensual representation of the people."[10] As discussed in detail later in the chapter, the Blair government was responsible for the institution of policy that sought to eradicate active legislative discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality and disability. Along with the eradication of common discriminations, however, it also sought to elide the many cultures that existed within Britain, glossing over cultural differences in the interests of cultivating and maintaining a strong collective national identity which it hoped would encourage social cohesion. As Newman suggests, "the new Labour's conception of the 'people' [was] an inclusionary and consensual one," one defined by common commitments to social solidarity and, as Michael Freeden puts it, "not being a nuisance to others."[11] Individual cultural norms and values could be celebrated, providing they did not conflict with Blair's vision of a united Britain. In Newman's words, "the 'people' could include differences, so long as those differences did not make a difference. As long as everyone was indeed 'well-intentioned'- disposed to take their opportunities, observe their responsibilities and generally behave reasonably- anyone could join."[12]

---

[9] Janet Newman, *Modernising Governance: New Labour, Policy and Society*, p154. London: Sage, 2001.
[10] Ibid, p155.
[11] Ibid, p158.
[12] Ibid.

Before beginning the project of assimilating minorities, including gays and lesbians, *into* a wider cultural mainstream, it was necessary for the Blair government to provide some definition *of* British mainstream culture, of which groups constituted the cultural norm and which the exceptions to it. From the very beginning of his time as Prime Minister, Blair established the idea of a solid and respectable centre of UK society from which certain disruptive or disenfranchised outsiders were alienated, either materially (in the case of unemployed and financially insolvent residents) or ideologically (in the case of minority ethnic and sexual communities). Norman Fairclough points, as illustrative of the New Labour tendency to differentiate between mainstream and outsider cultures, to an early speech of Blair's that laments "the deepening culture of a group of people [...] left out of the mainstream of society."[13] Blair's use of "we," as Fairclough observes, is telling. One clear fact that can be taken from the sentence is that "they," the outsider culture concerned, are not "us": that the "group of people" to which Blair referred "is set in opposition to 'we'," the dominant mainstream voting culture to which he addresses his political anxieties.[14] Blair spoke in this instance specifically of disaffected and underprivileged youth cultures, but as Fairclough notes, the them-and-us distinction underpinning his speech informed a great deal of his political rhetoric, and served to illustrate among other things what the latter calls "the difficulty of sustaining an inclusive political discourse in a divided society."[15]

Janet Newman observes that the "discourses and ideologies" of Blair's government "invoked a set of images through which civil society could be re-imagined" with a focus

---

[13] Norman Fairclough, *New Labour, New Language?* p37. London: Routledge, 2000.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

on "'national community and 'shared values,'" in short, unity.[16] Like Fairclough, she

notes that Blair's own discourse "was constructed through the inclusive concepts of 'we,'

'us' and 'together.'"[17] Like Fairclough's, her observations raise the questions of who

comprised the mainstream society which Blair and his party envisioned, and who

precisely was the "we" to whom he directed his rhetoric.

Broadly, the occupants of Blair's cultural mainstream were those UK citizens equipped

with an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities that characterise the

socially-democratic neoliberal economy, the desire to contribute socially and

economically to Britain's growth and the material means with which to do so. At the

time of Blair's election, a substantial number of social groups were deemed to have been

excluded from participation in this mainstream and the political and economic spheres

it suggested. These groups included, but were not restricted to, ethnic minorities, single

mothers, queers, the unemployed and unskilled and the poor. The concept of "social

exclusion" was deemed by the new government to require immediate attention, and in

late 1997 a specialised Social Exclusion Unit was established as a means of tackling the

problem, and bringing certain excluded groups (primarily those living below the poverty

line) back into the cultural fold. As Ruth Levitas and others note, social exclusion as

New Labour defined it encompassed not only material deprivation and economic

disadvantage, but also cultural disenfranchisement and alienation from mainstream

values. Employing the notion of a "moral underclass discourse" that "centres on the

moral and behavioural delinquency of the excluded themselves," Levitas identifies social

---

[16] Janet Newman, *Modernising Governance*, p145.
[17] Ibid.

exclusion (as imagined by the Blair government) as afflicting not just economically underprivileged groups but also any minority group stigmatised or denied a voice in the process of creating policy, law and order.[18] Successive Conservative governments having labelled them dangerous and degenerate, Britain's gay and lesbian communities were identified as comprising part of the "moral underclass."

Drawing them, and other "problem" and excluded groups back into the cultural mainstream was one of the many challenges facing Blair at the time of his election. His imagined "inclusive society" was one in which, as Levitas asserts, "everyone- or every individual group- has a voice," including those previously "excluded from or underrepresented in" mainstream political, economic and cultural spheres.[19] The smooth functioning of the Third Way political/economic model depended on such integration and social cohesion, on each individual desiring to work and contribute to the growth of the nation. The assimilation of lesbians and gays into mainstream British life was as such desirable, if not necessary for the economic progress that New Labour envisaged for Britain. Like other socially excluded minorities, they had held outsider status prior to Blair's election, but, after 1997, could enjoy the benefits of cultural integration, of constituting part of the homogenous mainstream "we."

Cultural unity, social integration and what Blair termed "strong communities" were essential to the Labour project in part because, as Stuart White suggests,

---

[18] Ruth Levitas, *The Inclusive Society?: Social Exclusion and New Labour*, p7. London: Macmillan, 1998.
[19] Ibid, p174.

to secure real opportunity for all, individuals must not stand alone, but in relationships of responsible, reciprocal support to each other [...] For people can obviously suffer great misfortunes - unemployment, ill- health, etc. - through no fault of their own, and they will then have a legitimate claim to assistance which in no way impugns their status as responsible individuals or citizens. To deny this and to insist that people always 'stand on their own two feet' would be to renege on the commitment to guarantee real opportunity for all.[20]

In this respect, the creation of a sense of collective responsibility was not an ethical measure born of governmental altruism, but a pragmatic solution to the twin issues of national economic maintenance and self-preservation. What was good for the individual, by New Labour's logic, was good for the nation, and vice versa. The integration into these "strong communities" of minorities (whether ethnic or sexual) and the removal of any lingering prejudices that this integration necessitated might equally be understood less as an attribute in itself than as an extension of the rights/responsibilities discourse. Integration and acceptance were two of the rights the British minority-identified individual might expect under New Labour, in exchange for bearing the responsibility of work. As then- Chancellor Gordon Brown argued in 1999: "[the] concept of democratic equality [...] demands employment opportunity for all because work is central not just to economic prosperity for Britain but to individual fulfilment. And there must be a permanent duty on government to relentlessly pursue this objective."[21]

---

[20] Stuart White, 'Interpreting the 'Third Way': Not One Route, But Many,' p20. *Renewal* 6:1, 1998.
[21] Gordon Brown, 'Equality- Then and Now,' p136. *The New Labour Reader*.

Under Blair, "employment opportunity" and social inclusion were achieved for queer and lesbian, gay and bisexual identified citizens through legislative means, and specifically through the creation of new and more inclusive laws, the alteration of existing pieces of legislation, and the steady abolition of policy and legislation that discriminated against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and the transgendered. Broadly, these changes can be regarded as having impacted upon three specific areas: youth sexuality, employment and access to goods and services, and status recognition, encompassing both sexual and gender identities. These areas are examined in detail below.

Youth Sexuality: Section 28 and the Age of Consent

Introduced in 1988 by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government as a means of protecting children from an imagined homosexual threat, Section 28 of the Local Government Act prohibited Local Authorities from "intentionally [promoting] homosexuality or [publishing] material with the intention of promoting homosexuality," and from "[promoting] the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship."[22] Established with the professed aim of redressing the perceived moral deficit of the education laws, the Section effectively barred the discussion of homosexuality in schools, or at least the discussion of homosexuality as a viable alternative to heterosexuality. Its implementation drew protests from the National Union of Teachers and the gay rights' organisations Stonewall and OutRage!, among others, and elicited criticism from many quarters.

---

[22] *Local Government Act 1988* (c.9).

Nevertheless, it remained in place on the statute books until the installation of Tony Blair as Prime Minister almost a decade later.

New Labour's election drew fresh attention to the issue of sex education and especially to the use of gay-themed educational materials in British classrooms. The Party's 1997 manifesto provided no clear indication of a policy change beyond acknowledging that societal "attitudes to race, sex and sexuality have changed fundamentally," and reiterating its stance on "equality."[23] Only months before the election, however, then-Shadow Home Secretary Jack Straw commented that, "the Labour Party opposed Section 28 when it was before Parliament in 1988, and it is our long-standing policy that we would repeal it."[24] For many within the newly-elected government, Section 28 served as nothing more than an archaic reminder of an intolerant political past incompatible with the 'progressive' New Labour virtues of openness and social inclusion. Echoing Straw, Cabinet Office Minister Jack Cunningham subsequently pledged: "the government believes Section 28 serves no useful purpose [...] Section 28 was wrong in 1987; it is wrong in 1999. And it will go."[25]

Talk of repeal, though, polarised both the Houses of Parliament and the British press. Matthew Waites notes in his discussion of Section 28 and the age of consent question that "since 1997 there have been signs of sexual moralism reasserting itself in public debates with renewed vigour": a claim supported by the acrimony with which Labour's

---

[23] http://www.bbc.co.uk/election97/background/parties/manlab/labman.html
[24] Quoted in *Gay Times*, April 1997.
[25] 'Government will scrap S28, says Cunningham.' Local Government Chronicle, 10th June 1999 < http://www.lgcplus.com/government-will-scrap-s28-says-cunningham/1417232.article> [12/06/08]

plans to scrap the clause were met in certain quarters.[26] A number of religious

organisations, including but not restricted to the Christian Institute and the Muslim

Council of Great Britain, spoke out in favour of retaining it, often vociferously; the right-

wing *Daily Mail* spearheaded a campaign to 'Keep The Clause' in the UK, while

billionaire Brian Souter, founder of the Stagecoach transport empire and an evangelical

Christian himself, did the same in Scotland, culminating in his 2000 campaign of the

same name. Newspapers from both ends of the political spectrum consistently carried

headlines and editorials pertaining to the debate, sometimes branding Section 28

'pernicious' and needlessly homophobic, sometimes proclaiming it necessary for the

'protection of the innocent.' A minority of Tory MPs, veering firmly away from a party

line that stressed the need to retain it, publicly expressed dissatisfaction with the

Conservative stance on repeal. Notable among these was Shaun Woodward, who

defected to New Labour in late 1999 in disgust at his colleagues' perceived homophobia.

Owing in large part to the House of Lords' opposition to reform, Section 28 was not

officially repealed until late 2003. However, as Waites observes, the sheer volume of

debate that preceded the abolition functioned both to establish the subject of same sex

desire in the public consciousness, and to allude to a telling alteration in political

attitudes towards gay issues. For all their vitriol, he says, the many anti-gay

Parliamentary speeches,

> the editorials of the *Daily Mail* and the campaigning literature of the Christian Institute
>
> […] reveal subtle changes in views on policy: engagement with, rather than evasion of,

---

[26] Matthew Waites, 'Regulation of Sexuality: Age of Consent, Section 28 and Sex Education,' p500. *Parliamentary Affairs* 54:3, 2001.

the existence of homophobic bullying, and the necessity of health promotion in schools to address HIV/AIDS. There were also changes in tone and sensibility reflecting a new self- consciousness produced in a culture which demands clearer engagement with the issue of homosexuality.[27]

Like the Section 28 debate, the furore which surrounded the equalisation of the UK age of consent laws appeared to cleave the public and the political worlds into two opposing camps, the progressively liberal, and the traditionally conservative. Since the legalisation of sex between men (aged twenty one and over) in Britain in 1967, there has been a visible disparity in the legal recognition of queer and straight sexual behaviours. In contrast to the age of consent for heterosexual sex, which has been set at sixteen since the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, the age of consent for homosexual sex had remained twenty one until 1994, when it was lowered to eighteen. New Labour, however, was unambiguous in its intention to implement a policy of full equalisation, even before its election. In 1994, in his capacity as Shadow Home Secretary, Tony Blair put forth the case for establishing a gay age of consent at 16. The issue, he argued,

> is not at what age we wish young people to have sex. It is whether the criminal law should discriminate between heterosexual and homosexual sex. It is therefore not an issue of age, but of equality. By supporting equality, no one is advocating or urging gay sex at 16 anymore than those who would maintain the age of consent for heterosexual sex advocate that girls or boys of 16 should have sex. It is simply a question of whether or not there are grounds for discrimination. At present, the law discriminates. [...] People

---

[27] Ibid, p501.

are entitled to think that homosexuality is wrong, but they are not entitled to use the criminal law to force that view upon others.[28]

Amendments to the Crime and Disorder Bill, encompassing the age of consent laws, were first proposed by the new government in July 1997. It was not until July of the following year, however, that the clause pertaining to the age of consent was subject to a vote in the Commons, where it was passed by a majority of 207. As with Section 28, however, the Lords were vehement in their opposition, and it was this vehemence, more than anything, which brought the age of consent debate out of the purely political arena, and into the public sphere.

Of the many peers committed to retaining the existing laws, it was Baroness Young (formerly Janet Young, Conservative Leader of the House of Lords from 1981-1983) who generated the highest media profile, and so commanded the greatest public attention. Both a Christian and a sponsor of the Christian orientated Family and Youth Concern organisation, Young galvanised the Lords into rejecting the amendments on three separate occasions, in July 1998, April 1999 and November 2000. Lowering the age of consent, she suggested, would "lead to demands to lower it still further," exposing the young to what she termed the "very great health risks" associated with same sex sexual behaviour.[29] Her comments, however, seem relatively tame in comparison to some of the sentiments expressed by her fellow peers over the course of the debates. For Baroness Seccombe, homosexuality was "not natural"[30]; for Lord Ashbourne,

[28] Hansard HC Deb 21st February 1994, vol. 238, cc.97-100.
[29] Hansard HL Deb 13th April 1999, Vol. 559, c.653.
[30] Ibid, c.723

homosexuality was "pathological," gay sex "unnatural, unsanitary and dangerous."[31] As was the case with Section 28, almost all those who opposed the amendments claimed to offer their contributions in the spirit of protecting the innocent, and protecting them specifically from the attentions of older, sexually predatory gay men.

Inevitably, many of the more incendiary quotes were reproduced in the press. In the more right-wing newspapers (again, as with Section 28) they appeared as a means of stirring up support for the Lords, and within the left-leaning ones they were used to outline the outmoded prejudices and bizarre preconceptions of an aging, uncompromising aristocracy. Opinion polls were commissioned on the theme, in a bid to establish whether or not the British public agreed with New Labour's policy of equalisation. These too were reproduced in print, although their findings were frequently contradictory. A MORI poll commissioned by the *Daily Mail* found 66% of respondents opposed to lowering the age of consent, and a similar one conducted by ICM on behalf of the *Guardian* concurred (with 69% against),[32] where an NOP poll cited by Stonewall found 66% in favour of the proposal.[33] The Conservative MP Edwina Currie (operating, like Shaun Woodward, against party lines) echoed Tony Blair's earlier words in insisting in print that, "[people] are not entitled to insist that their prejudices be written into British law."[34] As arguments for and against were disseminated widely and frequently via television coverage and the newspapers, the Labour government

---

[31] Ibid, c.726

[32] Figures courtesy of Stonewall <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/SEXR71permd.pdf> [21/12/07]

[33] Figures courtesy of Stonewall <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/information_bank/criminal_law/66.asp> [21/12/07]

[34] Sonja J. Ellis and Celia Kitzinger, 'Denying Equality: An Analysis of Arguments against Lowering the Age of Consent between Men,' p175. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 12:3, 2002.

continued to express, as Waites suggests, "considerable concern for lesbian and gay equality."[35] Full equalisation, however, was not achieved until the end of 2000, with the requisite amendments to the Crime and Disorder Bill eventually pushed through an immovable Lords by the invocation of the little- used Parliament Act, a small victory both for the government and for proponents of lesbian and gay equality.

Employment and Access to Goods and Services: Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 and the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007

The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations brought into force by the government at the end of 2003 prohibited discrimination, harassment and victimisation in the workplace on the grounds of sexual orientation, and followed precedents set by the implementation of similar regulations surrounding gender, religion or belief and disability. The new regulations made illegal not only the harassment of gay and lesbian staff once they were employed by a given company or service provider, but also established the unlawfulness of discriminating against those applying for positions on the basis of their sexual orientation. Unlike other legislative changes around sexuality that occurred before and since, the introduction of these regulations met with very little sensation or approbation from the British media. Their effects, however, were far-reaching and widely acknowledged, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to examine them in the following section.

---

[35] Matthew Waites, 'Regulation of Sexuality: Age of Consent, Section 28 and Sex Education,' p504.

The assimilation of LGBT Britons into the UK workforce through the removal of any and all legally-sanctioned obstacles to their employment progress served two major aims. First, it contributed to the government's target of increasing overall economic contribution through increasing labour power, and second, it encouraged applications from gay, lesbian and queer identified individuals into all industries and career areas, even those from which they had previously been discouraged or prohibited to enter, with the twin promises of equality of opportunity and protection from harm. A degree of proof of the efficacy of the regulations, or at the very least of their impact upon employer attitudes is provided by Stonewall, which works in association with gay-friendly British employers to "promote diversity in the workplace" and draw up unofficial good practice guidelines regarding the treatment of lesbian, gay and bisexual employees. Since 2005, just over a year after the introduction of the regulations, more than 260 new companies and employers have participated in the charity's 'Diversity Champions' programme, bringing the total of participants up to over 360. Recent participants have included firms and service providers as diverse as Barclays, Sheffield City Council, Merseyside Police, Imperial College London, The Royal Bank of Scotland and the National Grid.[36] The Royal Navy also appear on Stonewall's list as of 2005, somewhat surprisingly given that, until 2000, openly gay men and lesbian women were not permitted to serve in the UK armed forces.

It should be observed, however, that pressure for employers to conform to more stringent workplace regulations regarding sexual orientation originated as much from

---

[36] A full list of 'Diversity Champions' is provided at <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/1481.asp> [20/03/07].

external European forces (and especially the European Court of Human Rights) as from

Britain, and arguably had as much to do with the country's membership of the European

Union as with Blair's Third Way-inspired push for equality. Carl Stychin points as

evidence of this European pressure to the Amsterdam Treaty, to which Blair (along with

the representatives of the other member- states of the EU) committed in October 1997,

and which demanded that its signatories pledge to combat societal discrimination based

on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and, crucially, sexual

orientation.[37] The Treaty, sanctioned by the European Court of Human Rights, provided

a basis for employee challenging of inequality in Britain, particularly in the workplace,

while the European Court of Human Rights itself appeared as a higher authority to

which British courts and potentially discriminatory employers were compelled to defer.

Between 1997 and December 2003, when the new employment regulations began to be

enforced, a number of 'test cases' regarding unfair dismissal and anti-gay activities in

the workplace were put first before the British Court of Appeal, and then the European

Court of Human Rights, notably Lisa Grant v. South West Trains and Smith v. Gardner

Merchant (both 1998).[38] The lifting of the ban on gays and lesbians in the UK military

services was also precipitated by intervention at a European level, with other cases

brought by military personnel dismissed on the grounds of sexual orientation (Lustig-

Prean and Beckett vs. the United Kingdom 1999; Smith and Grady vs. the United

Kingdom 1999) appearing prior to 2000 before the European Court of Human Rights,

---

[37] Carl F. Stychin, 'A Queer Nation By Rights: European Integration, Sexual Identity Politics and the Discourse of Rights,' p207. Eds. Kate Chedgzoy, Emma Francis, Murray Pratt. *In A Queer Place: Sexuality and Belonging in British and European Contexts*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002.
[38] Grant, a lesbian employee for South West Trains, applied for spousal travel entitlements for her partner Jill Percey, and was refused on the basis of Percey's gender. She subsequently sued SWT for sex discrimination. Smith, a barman, similarly sued his employer for sex discrimination following allegedly homophobic harassment from a co-worker.

which ultimately ruled their dismissals illegal. Interestingly, these cases were themselves framed as Stychin suggests "within the logic of the market [...] in large measure so as to ensure a more receptive hearing."[39] The appellants in these instances appealed to the same right/responsibility to work reasoning that informed the political rhetoric of Blair and Brown, making reference to their 'rights' to work, to serve their country and their employers without impediment. Once again, market forces functioned as a base position from which arguments about equality were formulated. Again, the validity of queer rights was determined by the national economic benefits the dispensation of those rights might provide. As Linda Dickens puts it,

> Discrimination is a moral issue, a question of social justice and human rights. But governmental concern is not only for justice and fairness but also competitiveness and economic efficiency. [...] There is a concern with fairness, but only up to a point [...] Human rights/ equality arguments are not privileged over those of economic efficiency. However, where competitiveness/ economic efficiency ends are seen as likely to be served by potentially equality- promoting measures, this can help encourage and justify legislative intervention (or make it more palatable to those who may view it mainly as costly).[40]

Like Section 28 and the lowering of the age of consent, the terms of the 2007 Equality Act have generated controversy in both the UK media and the more vocal wings of the Catholic and Anglican churches. Passed in April 2007 as an extension of an Act already

---

[39] Ibid, p218.
[40] Linda Dickens, 'The Road is Long: Thirty Years of Equality Legislation in Britain,' p468. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 45:3, 2007.

covering gender, race, religion or belief and disability, the regulations prohibited goods and service providers from discriminating against gay and lesbian customers or service users on the basis of their sexual orientation. Schools, charities, local authorities, banks, hotels and other entertainment venues were specifically referred to in the legislation as areas to which the regulations might apply. Within the mainstream press, the regulations were primarily constructed as a means of forcing homophobic or uncooperative publicans and hoteliers to accommodate gay and lesbian guests, regardless of their own wishes or the rules of their establishments. Much media attention focused, moreover, on the apparent crises of conscience that might potentially be suffered by the religious, should they be required to provide goods or services to gay or lesbian individuals despite disapproving of their identities or sexual practices, or finding such practices sinful.

The greatest controversy sparked by the new regulations, however, revolved around the issue of adoption, and specifically adoption agencies. Prior to 2007, certain (mostly Catholic) adoption agencies were entitled to refuse to place children in the care of those whom they found to be morally objectionable, including gay male and lesbian couples, whose sexual orientations ran counter to Christian and other religious teachings on ethics and morality.[41] The implementation of the regulations, though, effectively eradicated this entitlement, although it should be observed that those agencies affected were, after much protest, afforded a grace period in which to adapt to the changes.[42] These protests, covered extensively by the print and broadcast media, were led by

---

[41] These agencies, however, were the exception rather than the rule. Since the passing of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, which removed the necessity that a couple be legally married in order to adopt a child, same-sex couples have been able to apply to adoption agencies on the same terms as heterosexuals.
[42] Russell Sandberg and Norman Doe, 'Religious Exemptions in Discrimination Law,' p308. *Cambridge Law Journal* 66:2, 2007.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, head of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales. In an open letter distributed to the Prime Minister and individual members of the Cabinet in the January that preceded to the passing of the regulations, Murphy-O'Connor outlined the "serious difficulty" the Church would have in abiding by their terms, stressing the "significant emphasis" placed on heterosexual marriage by the organisation and implicitly critiquing the validity of gay and lesbian relationships by reiterating that "marital love involves an essential complementarity of male and female."[43] His lead was followed almost immediately by Anglicans Rowan Williams and John Sentamu, Archbishops of Canterbury and York respectively, who similarly petitioned Blair on behalf of those Christians finding their consciences compromised at the prospect of the legislation. This move, like Murphy-O'Connor's was well-documented, while media responses to it fell along typically partisan lines, with *Guardian* and *Independent* coverage largely opposed to the perceived religious bigotry demonstrated, and columnists at the right-leaning *Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* quick to applaud the priests in question for uniting against an imagined militant homosexual agenda.[44]

The deadline for Catholic and other religious adoption agencies' adherence to the terms of the regulations passed on 31st December 2008, prompting further outcry from

---

[43] A copy of the letter is located within the website for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster, at <http://www.rcdow.org.uk/cardinal/default.asp?library_ref=&content_ref=1179> [26/03/08].
[44] For examples of this partisan divide on the gay adoption issue, see: 'Was Archbishop's Intervention a Mistake?,' *Guardian* 25th January 2007; 'Two Churches, One View and a Question of Conscience,' *Guardian* 25th January 2007; 'Sexual Disorientation,' *Telegraph* 24th January 2007; 'Regulation Must Not Trump Conscience,' *Telegraph* 31st January 2007; 'Gay Adoption: True Stories,' *Independent* 25th January 2007; 'Tories' Anger as Cameron Backs Blair on Adoption,' *Daily Mail* 30th January 2007; 'Archbishop: Adoption Rules Put Other Charity Work at Risk,' *Daily Mail* 30th January 2007.

religious quarters.[45] However, as has been the case with the earlier debates around gay and lesbian sexuality and the law, the publicity granted to the regulatory changes has been such as to place LGBT and queer issues back in the spotlight. Deliberately or not, the Cardinal, the two Archbishops and their followers have done a great deal to engender public interest in the rights and legislative protections newly afforded gay and lesbian Britons.

Status Recognition: Sexual Offences Act 2003, the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and the Civil Partnerships Act 2004

Of these protections, those offered by the Sexual Offences Act and the Criminal Justice Act (both 2003) have been among the most far-reaching. Both sought to normalise non-hetero sexuality, and so further assist the assimilation of gays and lesbians into the cultural and economic mainstream. The former has worked to remove some, though not all of the illegality and stigma surrounding certain expressions of queer sexuality, while the latter has acknowledged the minority status of lesbian, gay and bisexual identities, so affording individual gays, lesbians and queers greater protection against possible homophobic abuse.

The Sexual Offences Act 2003, which became law in May 2004, was notable for (among other things) removing from the statute books the gay male specific acts of buggery and gross indecency (a term that pertained exclusively to male homosexual sex), and replacing them with gender-neutral crimes. It explicitly repealed the terms of all earlier sexual offences law which had criminalised same-sex sexual conduct, including those

---

[45] *Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007.*

which targeted group sex between men, and those which penalised public displays of same- sex affection.[46] For gay, bisexual and queer British men, however, its terms were something of a mixed bag. Several aspects of the Act met with condemnation from queer activists and academics. Particularly condemned was Section 71, which specifically forbids "sexual activity in a public lavatory," or cottaging, which if considered on the basis of prosecutions brought in the UK prior to 2003 might well be conceived of as an exclusively gay, bisexual and queer male pursuit. Peter Tatchell observes that the new legislation.

> ignores heterosexual sex in public places such as lover's lanes and motorway lay-bys […] While a straight couple who are caught having sex in a public place are usually charged under laws like the Public Order Act which carry a maximum sentence of six months imprisonment, sex in public toilets will carry a top penalty of two years jail.[47]

Paul Johnson concurs, suggesting that the law pays little heed to heterosexual public sex acts (for example, dogging), but rather expresses on the part of lawmakers "a concern not for the policing of public sex generally, nor for the general policing of sex in public lavatories, but for the policing of homosexual casual sex." [48] The result is, as he suggests, "the performative reinscription of a particular type of sexual figure who is deviant, abnormal, suspect, and in need of regulation by the criminal law."[49]

---

[46] Sexual Offences Act 2003 (c42).
[47] <http://www.petertatchell.net>
[48] Paul Johnson, 'Ordinary Folk and Cottaging: Law, Morality and Public Sex,' p532. Journal of Law and Society 34:4, 2007.
[49] Ibid.

The recent criminalisation of cottaging, in fact, seems perfectly to illustrate New Labour's overall position on issues of equality, specifically its emphasis on reciprocal obligations and the extension of legal rights and recognitions to those willing to shoulder social and economic responsibilities. Returning to Michael Freeden's assertion that "individual virtue" for Blair's government equated to "not being a nuisance to others," it might be speculated that those men who actively seek out sex with other men in public bathrooms represent an undesirable "nuisance" to others, in particular those opposed to *all* forms of same-sex sexual activity and not just its public manifestations. Johnson notes that

> In discussions about such sexual activity it is always the 'publicness' of lavatories which is emphasised. Yet, ironically, it is the very privateness of public toilets which afford the possibilities for the sexual encounters which take place within them.[50]

Nevertheless, once characterised as a public nuisance, men seeking sex with other men in public toilets may be penalised, and so cast in opposition not only to those imagined right-thinking, law-abiding (heterosexual) members of the public whom the laws were ostensibly designed to protect, but also to the assimilated and law-abiding gay man content to keep his or her sexual activity contained behind closed doors and to represent no kind of nuisance to heterosexual voters who might find themselves bothered by overt demonstrations of non-heterosexual sexual behaviour. Writing on the Thatcher/ Major Conservative governments and the British New Right, Anna Marie Smith draws a distinction between right-wing political constructions of the "dangerous queer," who is

---

[50] Ibid, p535.

sexually active and politically militant, a transmitter of disease and dissent who "pursues the socio-political infection of the general population at every turn," and the "good homosexual," an "imaginary figure" who is "totally isolated from a gay and lesbian community, bereft of political solidarity, alienated from sexual relationships, and purified of every last fragment of a "not-normal" sexual desire."[51] This distinction is enormously important not only to critiques of Labour policy on sexuality, but to this project as a whole. Right-wing homophobia, she argues, "promises to grant [the "good homosexual"] full inclusion within the new social order": to assimilate him or her into the cultural mainstream, on the understanding that he or she rids him/ herself of "undesirable" behaviours.[52] To a lesser extent, Blair's New Labour government followed a similar pattern, its Third Way affording "good homosexuals" the benefits of social inclusion and legislative protection on the understanding that they contribute financially and behave in the manner deemed appropriate, and punishing "dangerous queers" for their social and sexual transgressions. The "good homosexual"/"dangerous queer" dichotomy, in fact, proved influential not only in the creation of government policy, but in cultural production. As the case studies that follow demonstrate, a surprising number of television programmes produced and commissioned during the 1997-2007 period characterise gay, lesbian and queer sexualities along such lines, with the respectable, assimilated gay and lesbian characters frequently depicted as "good homosexuals," and the disruptive or unassimilated ones marked as "dangerous queers."

---

[51] Anna Marie Smith, 'The Imaginary Inclusion of the Assimilable 'Good Homosexual': The British New Right's Representations of Sexuality and Race,' p64. Diacritics 24:2/3, 1994.
[52] Ibid.

The terms of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 secured for lesbian, gay and bisexual Britons one such benefit: protection from physical harm, or at least harm wrought on the basis of sexuality. Pre-dating the Equality Act but operating along similarly essentialist and what Carl Stychin terms "identitarian" lines in its categorisation of sexual orientation as a fixed category,[53] it sanctioned (among many other things) an increase in court sentencing for crimes "aggravated" by the race, religion, disability or, crucially, sexual orientation of their victims.[54] The Act defined crimes motivated by sexual orientation either as those in which "the offender [demonstrates] towards the victim of the offence hostility based on the sexual orientation (or presumed sexual orientation) of the victim," or those in which "the offence is motivated (wholly or partly) by hostility towards persons who are of a particular sexual orientation."[55] It served effectively to publicly reconstruct and redefine verbal or physical expressions of homophobia as hate crimes, and hate crimes that would expose their perpetrators to much higher sentences than before, with the minimum "starting point" of jail term handed down for murders motivated by homophobia set at 30 years.

Of the laws and regulations regarding sexuality passed under New Labour, the Civil Partnerships Act was perhaps the most successful in levelling the playing field between lesbian, gay and bisexual Britons and their heterosexual counterparts, and so integrating them into the mainstream. In broad terms, the Act functioned to equate queer relationships with straight ones by granting same-sex couples the opportunity to publicly enter into a legally-binding union, in a ceremony very much akin to a civil

---

[53] Carl F. Stychin, 'Being Gay' pp104. Government and Opposition 40:1, 2005.
[54] Criminal Justice Act 2003 (c.44).
[55] Ibid.

marriage. The terms of the Act entitled same-sex couples, once civilly partnered, to exactly the same rights and responsibilities as married heterosexuals, encompassing property and tenancy rights, inheritance tax exemptions, benefit claims and next-of-kin recognition. They also afforded civil partners the same duty of care for any children involved as in instances of heterosexual marriage. Upon the Act's launch, the government was quick to market these terms as a redress of previous inequalities, and a further step towards the social and legal inclusion of sexual minorities. Said New Labour Equalities Minister Jacqui Smith: "it opens the way to respect, recognition and justice for those who have been denied it for too long."[56]

Typically for a piece of legislation concerned with the rights of non-heterosexuals, the Act met with opposition from some quarters. Religious groups and right-leaning peers, most prominently the ultra-conservative Baroness O'Cathain, decried it on moral grounds. Certain British gay activists, however, also took issue with the Act. Their disagreement was not with its terms, per se, but with the very existence of civil partnership as distinct from traditional marriage, and more specifically with the government's unwillingness to extend traditional, existing marriage rights to those lesbian, gay and bisexual citizens who might want them. For Blair's Labour government, civil partnership served as an institution separate from but equal to marriage in terms of the provisions made for those entering into it, something equal but different. Carl Stychin terms the passing of the Act "a victory for the politics of compromise," that "seems to have satisfied those sections of the lesbian and gay communities that desire

---

[56] Quoted on the BBC News website, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3584285.stm> [03/04/07].

some form of legal recognition and protection for their relationships" while appearing "not to have riled (with some exceptions) that significantly large segment of the population that is strongly opposed to same-sex marriage."[57] By terming same-sex unions 'civil partnerships' rather than 'marriages,' the Act protected the much-debated sanctity of marriage as an institution, while allowing the term 'marriage' to remain something that pertained exclusively to legally-sanctioned opposite-sex relationships. Heterosexuals concerned about their institution being undermined were therefore pacified, albeit at the expense of those gays and lesbians who sought to have their partnerships certified *as* marriages, and not marriage-equivalents.

The public and media response to the passing of the Civil Partnerships Act was by and large positive and celebratory, with the first wave of partnerships enacted in December 2005, including the high-profile union of singer Elton John and his partner, receiving extensive press coverage. Attention focused, at least in the left-leaning and centrist press, on the victory for human rights and social inclusion presented by the Act's passage. Reporting on the first civil partnership to take place in the UK, on December 19th, the *Guardian* termed the moment "a momentous day in gay rights' history."[58] By December 2006, reflecting upon the level of public acceptance with which civil partnerships were met, the same paper concluded that "same-sex partnerships are a firm feature of British national life."[59] Stychin terms the Act "a mechanism designed, not only for legal, but for social inclusion of lesbians and gay men."[60] Given media responses

---

[57] Carl F. Stychin, 'Not (Quite) a Horse and Carriage: The Civil Partnership Act 2004,' p79. Feminist Legal Studies 14:1, 2006.
[58] 'Champagne, Pedicures and a Place in History for the Belfast Brides,' Guardian 19th December 2005.
[59] 'More than 15,500 Civil Partnerships Prove Popularity of Legislation,' Guardian 5th December 2006.
[60] Carl F. Stychin, 'Not (Quite) a Horse and Carriage: The Civil Partnership Act 2004,' p83.

and the large volume of civil partnerships conducted even in the year that followed its implementation (estimated at more than 15,500), it would appear to have achieved the ends for which it was created.[61]

The distinction between this "social inclusion" and what Stychin sees as legitimate social change is particularly telling in this context, however. Despite the government's unwillingness to extend bona fide marriage rights to same-sex couples, the resemblance of civil partnership to the heterosexual marriage model is deliberately striking:[62] It was, after all, constructed as Jacqui Smith noted to "[mirror] as fully as possible the rights and responsibilities enjoyed by those who can marry […] for reasons of equality."[63] The government's goal in introducing civil partnerships in the UK was clear: to further assimilate gays and lesbians into the societal mainstream by offering them access to a facsimile of a long-standing cultural practice, one based around the foundational concept of the traditional monogamous couple, and the children whom they produce. Identifying a number of "key concepts" that informed the New Labour ideology, and which impacted upon the government's approach to "governing" sexuality, Stychin cites the role of family in "producing responsible, active new citizens" as crucial to the implementation of those Third Way policies which promised to provide an economic

---

[61] Carl F. Stychin, 'Not (Quite) a Horse and Carriage: The Civil Partnership Act 2004,' p83.
[62] The role of the Britain's membership of the EU in bringing about the introduction of civil partnerships (as a separate but equal institution distinct from marriage) is doubtless significant here, too. As of 2004, only two European countries (Belgium and the Netherlands) officially recognised same- sex marriage, while a number of others offered some form or other of legally- recognised civil union, including France, Germany, Sweden, Norway and Denmark. The passing of the Human Rights Act in 1998 meant that British courts were obliged thereafter to take into account decisions made at the ECHR, as well as the protections and human rights guaranteed earlier, at the European Convention on Human Rights. Since these rights included the right to marry and start a family, it was arguably only a matter of time before the British legal position on same- sex unions, or the lack thereof in the UK, was challenged in such a way as to render such a lack untenable.
[63] Hansard HC Deb vol. 426, c.776, 9th November 2004: Report Stage.

boost for the nation.[64] Moreover, he concedes that "within the debates [surrounding the

Civil Partnerships Act], there [was] virtually no space for a critical interrogation of the

institution of marriage, or the need for an alternative model of legal recognition

available to all."[65] He does however note the irony of a situation wherein Conservative

opponents of the Act, who proposed that civil partnerships (if offered not as marriage,

but as a marriage alternative) be made available not just to couples but to all those

(including blood relatives) who desire to undertake one, were

> not wholly dissimilar to not more radical feminist and queer readings of the legislation.
> The argument is that if the state is going to recognise relationship forms outside of the
> institution of marriage, then it should take the opportunity to consider real alternatives
> to the marriage model that might be available more widely; a model in which conjugality
> might be deprivileged.[66]

Civil partnership, according to this logic, is a question of containment rather than

disruption, of the incorporation of sexual minorities into legal, cultural and political

systems from which they were historically excluded. Shannon Winnubst sees the

possibility of same-sex marriage as symptomatic of "the interlocking systems of

domination at work in cultures of advanced capitalism," and an example of "the

triumph" of the capitalist mode and "its ongoing co-optation of all attempts at

resistance."[67] Speaking of the debates surrounding gay marriage in the US, she argues in

favour of "the radical reconfiguration of the family" and concludes that "the same-sex

---

[64] Carl F. Stychin, Governing Sexuality: The Changing Politics of Sexuality and Law Reform, p29. Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2003.
[65] Carl F. Stychin, 'Not (Quite) a Horse and Carriage: The Civil Partnership Act 2004,' p81.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Shannon Winnubst, *Queering Freedom*, p202. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.

marriage debate is threatening to flatten and erase any such possibilities." [68] Similar

conclusions may be drawn about the recent introduction of civil partnerships in the UK.

Certainly, the Civil Partnership Act complemented Blair's neoliberal Third Way, pre-

empting and so preventing any possible destabilisation by radical or "dangerous" queers

of marriage or the family, the institutions upon which advanced capitalism depends, and

upon which Blair's government placed so much emphasis. Perhaps more than any other

piece of legislation implemented since 1997, the Act served to assuage potential sexual

and political dissidents, by presenting them with the much-needed benefits of a

marriage-like status that would ensure their integration into the mainstream. So it

serves, more than anything else, as an illustration of neoliberalism making British gay

and lesbian communities an offer they couldn't refuse.

Consequences: "gay rights" and cosmopolitan Britain

The impact of these particular legislative changes upon gay, lesbian and queer visibility

on British television was largely indirect, although no less substantive for it. Brian

McNair explicitly links the increase in queer visibility in the British media and

particularly on television to the greater legal recognition of gay men, lesbians and the

"polymorphously perverse."[69] He also connects the increased legislative benefits

afforded gay and lesbian Britons in the 1990s with a commensurate increase in the

economic power they have come to wield and the growth of markets specifically

designed to appeal to gay and lesbian consumers, markets that aim to harness the

[68] Ibid, p205.
[69] Brian McNair, *Striptease Culture,* p4.

potential of the so-called pink pound. As of 2000, he observes, Britain's ever-more-integrated "gay community,"

> earned collectively £95 billion, of which £10 billion was available for them to spend as disposable income. This earning power was reflected in an expanding culture of sexual consumerism focused on 'gay villages' and services, and facilitated through e-commerce websites like queer.com.[70]

This "sexual consumerism," he suggests, is indicative of British gay and lesbian culture's assimilation into the cultural mainstream, and the reciprocal response of individual gays and lesbians to their induction into the consumer-capitalist marketplace. With many of the traditional barriers to social and economic progress removed through legislative process, British gays and lesbians are now free to earn and spend freely, and so represent a lucrative and hitherto-untapped market for product vendors and advertisers. Buoyed up by new legal rights and protections, gay and lesbian consumers have become valuable assets to the UK economy, just as the Blair government desired, offering further encouragement to policy-makers, service providers and manufacturers to "make space for a gay public in the cultural marketplace."[71]

Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs characterise this new, gay room within the "cultural marketplace" as "cosmopolitan space."[72] With rather more cynicism than McNair, they suggest that gays and lesbians have in recent years become "incorporated for profit" into

---

[70] Ibid, p5.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs, 'Cosmopolitan knowledge and the construction and consumption of cosmopolitan space: Manchester's gay village.' *Sociological Review* 52:1, 2004.

the fabric of British culture and that ostensibly gay, lesbian and queer public spaces, products and services are now consumed and enjoyed by non-heterosexuals and self-consciously liberal or "cosmopolitan" heterosexuals alike.[73] As homosexuality sheds its stigma and ceases to be characterised in law as deviant or transgressive, increasing numbers of heterosexuals look to gay and lesbian culture as a source of cosmopolitan knowledge and entertainment. Cosmopolitanism, Binnie and Skeggs suggest,

> is most commonly conceived or represented as a particular attitude towards difference. To be a cosmopolitan one has to have access to a particular form of knowledge, able to appropriate and know the other and generate authority from this knowing.[74]

Ostensibly gay and lesbian spaces and products can therefore provide narcissistic pleasure for cosmopolitan consumers, who imagine that they culturally enriched through knowledge of and familiarity with an alternative culture. So great may the heterosexual presence become that the space or product itself may be described as cosmopolitan, rather than specifically gay or lesbian. In social capital terms, the experience of the queer space or thing is "converted into exchange value for the person which enables them to move through social space with entitlement and access a wider range of areas than those without the requisite capital."[75] This idea has obvious implications for the production, broadcast and consumption of gay, lesbian and queer television. In an increasingly cosmopolitan Britain, LGBT and queer viewers are very likely not the sole intended audience of gay, lesbian and queer-themed shows and

---

[73] Ibid, p57.
[74] Ibid, p42.
[75] Ibid, p45.

material. The increased marketability of gay, lesbian and queer sexuality and cultures and the likelihood that LGBT and queer material will be enjoyed by straight, cosmopolitan viewers is one of several factors that have contributed to the increasing prevalence of such material on UK screens. It is however worth noting that this marketability extends only to certain kinds of non-heterosexual representation, that is, that which is just "different" enough to bring cosmopolitan pleasure but not so different or confrontational as to be "disruptive" to capitalism or hetero-patriarchal standards of behaviour.[76]

Several advertisements screened on British terrestrial television during the 1997-2007 period illustrate this point. Perceived increases in the marketability of non-hetero sexualities and 'alternative lifestyles' to heterosexual consumers have led certain advertisers to utilise gay and lesbian images as a means of selling products to these consumers. Frequently, these advertisers also situate non-hetero sexuality as a site of heterosexual cosmopolitan knowledge, explicitly pitching the products in question to sections of the cosmopolitan-identified heterosexual populace, as well as (to a lesser extent) gay and lesbian consumers.

The 'Chance Encounter' advert for Impulse body spray, first screened in 1998, was among the first UK advertisements to capitalise on gay identity. The advert shows a young woman, whom the audience must assume to be wearing Impulse, attracting the attention of a good-looking man after dropping her shopping bag in the street. After

---

[76] Ibid, p41. I return to the subject of cosmopolitanism and the construction of queer television programming as cosmopolitan space in later chapters, particularly in reference to Channel 4. Some discussion of the different modes of queer visibility offered by contemporary terrestrial television and what each signifies is provided through case studies of individual programmes.

exchanging flirtatious glances with the woman for a few seconds as he helps pick up the spilled shopping, the man is ushered from her away by another, identically-dressed young man. Confused, the woman looks around at the people and objects surrounding her in the street: bare-chested and well-built men whispering intimately to one another, obviously marked as gay; rainbow flags; a small dog in studded leather biker-wear; Quentin Crisp (in cameo), in make-up and a rather fey straw hat. Looking back at the original man and his friend, who has now placed a proprietary arm around his shoulders, the penny drops: the men are lovers, and the girl has found herself in a gay district, apparently by chance. There are no hard feelings, however. Instead, no longer feeling quite so rejected, the girl smiles, and slaps a palm to her forehead in a typical "I should have known" gesture. The advert's tagline suggests that "men [read: even gay men] can't help acting on Impulse."

The second advert, a promotion for Galaxy's Promises chocolate screened in 2005, follows a similar premise. Sunbathing on her rooftop, a woman catches sight of an attractive man. She adjusts her position on the sun-lounger so as to better observe him as he disappears out of her line of vision... and then reappears a moment later, with a man whom the audience must assume to be his partner, who drapes himself with unforced intimacy around the first man's neck. The sunbathing woman mock-grimaces and then leans back on the lounger, disappointed but half-smiling: like the Impulse girl, she "should have known," but didn't. The tagline here is: "Galaxy Promises: Different every time."

These two promotions, as well as similarly-themed recent UK adverts for Organics shampoo (in 2002) among others, characterise cosmopolitan knowledge and specifically the knowledge of homosexuality as highly desirable, if not essential for modern women in the contemporary world. In both adverts described above, the joke is on the women who demonstrate a lack of cosmopolitan knowledge, who cannot identify homosexuality even when confronted with it, rather than on the gay men themselves: a definite shift in tone from advertising and television programming that previously positioned in particular gay men as exclusively figures of fun. Neither taps explicitly into the pink pound, in that neither seems directed specifically at gay and lesbian consumers. In appearing to place a premium on cosmopolitan knowledge, though, both position their products (and so the companies responsible for the production of these products) as gay friendly, and so attractive to gay and lesbian consumers seeking to purchase fragrances, chocolate, hair products and so on without the stigma of corporate homophobia attached.[77]

McNair also posits changes in the cultural, political and economic meanings of sexual identity in contemporary Britain as highly significant determinants of media output. Media representations of sexual minority groups, he argues, serve a "triple function": firstly, "they reveal what sexual and behavioural norms are in a given society at a given moment"; secondly, they "function as bearers of ideology," on the basis that

---

[77] The limits of the kind of queer visibility offered by television advertising even in the last decade are all too apparent, however. While images of the kinds of young, attractive queerness which lends itself to the accumulation of cosmopolitan knowledge increasingly proliferate on terrestrial television, other kinds of queerness still present problems for mainstream audiences, when they appear at all. The example of the Heinz Deli Mayonnaise advert, which appeared to show a gay male couple displaying physical affection in front of their children and which aired very briefly in 2008 before being withdrawn following viewer complaints, demonstrates this well.

we learn from media culture […] something of our roles, rights and responsibilities in the sexual as in other arenas. This learning does not take place in a vacuum, of course, but in an environment shaped by the twists and turns of sexual politics and their cumulative effects on all aspects of ours lives.[78]

Thirdly, he notes, "media representations distribute ideas about sexuality," since they "must also resonate with where we are as individuals, as sexual communities and as societies."[79] Together, these functions suggest a strong influence exerted by contemporary politics upon the media sphere, and especially upon television: the ubiquity of the television set making, as Jim McGuigan says, a strong case for "seeing it as a distinctly democratising medium," and so for its usefulness to those interested in the promotion of a specific ideology.[80]

Jane Arthurs sees the increase in gay, lesbian and queer visibility on British television as indicative of "the profound changes that have transformed the way in which people inhabit their gender in advanced capitalist societies."[81] She too links these changes as they have occurred within a British context to the "flurry of legislation in the UK around matters sexual" that accompanied "the new political agenda on sexuality [which] emerged from 1997 with New Labour in power."[82] Indeed, she suggests, the "emergence of programmes addressed to gay and lesbian audiences […] can be understood as the

---

[78] Brian McNair, *Striptease Culture*, p111.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Jim McGuigan, *Culture and the Public Sphere*, p46. London: Routledge, 1996.
[81] Jane Arthurs, *Television and Sexuality: Regulation and the Politics of Taste*, p2. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, 2004.
[82] Ibid, p3.

product of the changing political discourses instituted."[83] In the case studies that follow in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I examine representations of queerness on British terrestrial television in the 1997-2007 period in the context of these legislative changes, drawing connections between the individual pieces of legislation detailed above and the subsequent media controversy (or lack thereof) created, the place of this legislation in the broader Third Way ideology and the television programming produced within the New Labour political climate.

These case studies seek to investigate the relationship between gay, lesbian and queer programming and individual channel brand identity within the British broadcasting environment of the late 1990s and early 2000s. To this end, it is necessary to examine the role of broadcasting policy instituted during Blair's decade as Prime Minister in determining the broadcasting content of the channels in question. It is likewise necessary to attempt to understand the way in which this policy serves, or fails to serve a Third Way agenda. Did New Labour's broadcasting policies complement or contradict its policy line on the assimilation of non-hetero sexualities into the cultural mainstream? And how, moreover, were these correlations or contradictions borne out in the television broadcasting content of the era? The latter question forms the primary research question of this project, and is addressed at length in subsequent chapters. The former, however, may be dealt with here and now.

British television policy 1997-2003: gay, lesbian and queer visibility and digital broadcasting

---

[83] Ibid, p28.

The launch of digital terrestrial television in 1998 proved highly influential in determining gay, lesbian and queer programme content on UK screens thereafter. Though initially pioneered by John Major's government, the digitisation project was as Des Freedman notes "high on [New Labour's] list of priorities" as the party "immediately sought to step up the pace of digital take-up."[84] Immediately following Blair's election as Prime Minister, the Department of Media, Culture and Sport (created in 1997 as a replacement for the outmoded Department of Heritage) announced plans to bring digital service to British audiences as swiftly as possible. This rush towards digitisation was justified as being in part so as to "ensure universal access" to *all* free-to-air public service channels for *all* viewers, and in part to end, in the interests of economy, "the current wasteful use of valuable radio spectrum for analogue terrestrial broadcasting."[85] As of November 1998 the government had granted a number of companies license to broadcast digitally, including the BBC, ITV and Channels 4 and 5. In 1999, Chris Smith (then- Minister for Culture, Media and Sport) set the date for the complete switchover to digital of all television services, and so for the turning off of all analogue services, as between 2006 and 2010.[86] Smith did, however, emphasise the need for public service broadcasting to continue to remain, as Georgina Born puts it, "at the core of Britain's digital broadcasting ecology."[87] As of 2009, it appears to have continued to occupy this position, with more than half of all free digital terrestrial channels, and over three-quarters of channels primarily offering scripted entertainment

[84] Des Freedman, Television Policies of the Labour Party, 1951-2001, p178. London: Frank Cass, 2003.
[85] Ibid.
[86] The analogue switch- off date has since been modified, and the DCMS now sets the final date for switchover in mainland Britain at 2012.
[87] Georgina Born, 'Strategy, positioning and projection in digital television: Channel 4 and the commercialisation of public service broadcasting in the UK,' p774. Media, Culture & Society, 25:6, 2003

programming (rather than exclusively news, sport or home-shopping programming) provided by Channel 4, Channel 5, ITV and the BBC.

The sudden increase in digital terrestrial channels available to UK audiences had inevitable consequences for gay, lesbian and queer programming. Just as alterations in policy on sexuality helped foster a cultural climate wherein this programming could be regarded as commercially- viable and hence desirable by broadcasters, so government policy on digitisation further contributed to the shaping of a television landscape that ultimately increased both overall gay, lesbian and queer visibility and a greater diversity of LGBT and queer representations on British screens. The increase in the availability of digital terrestrial channels has forced *all* existing channels to strengthen their brand identities, so as to continue to attract viewers in an overpopulated market. This strengthening of brand identity has consequences for individual broadcasters' handling of lesbian, gay and queer programming, a point discussed in greater detail later in this section. For John Ellis, the post-digital increase in the volume of channels and subsequently of programmes was instrumental in the facilitation of multiple modes of representation on screen, and especially in the representation of groups previously conceived of as "minority." The role of public service broadcasting within the digital environment, he suggests, is not to promote cultural unity, but to "[deal] in displays of national disunity."[88] Ideally, it should

> provide the forum within which the emerging culture of multiple identities can negotiate
> its antagonisms […] The new public service broadcasting is no longer concerned with

---

[88] John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the age of uncertainty*, p87. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.

imposing consensus, but with working through new possibilities of consensus. It is concerned with exploring diversity rather than with trying to divide social exchanges into the typical and the minority.[89]

Digitisation by his logic represents a positive advance for gay, lesbian and queer visibility on television by creating more scheduling space in which LGBT and queer identities and the issues that surround them could be explored, and so "worked through" by audiences.[90] Moreover, he views the arrival of digital television in terms of what he regards as its power to break down those social boundaries separating fringe groups from "typical" audiences, and so ultimately to help facilitate the assimilation of minorities, including gays and lesbians, into the cultural mainstream. In this respect, Ellis shares common ideological ground with the Blair government, which so often characterised new technologies in terms of their capacity to integrate minorities and the economically and/or culturally disenfranchised, and likewise in terms of their capacity to overhaul and otherwise "modernise" British culture.[91]

Increases in the availability of channels, of course, does not automatically equate to an increased on screen gay, lesbian or queer presence. Nor does it guarantee that increased visibility (should it occur) will present audiences with unwaveringly positive representations of non-hetero sexualities. Both the *amount* and the *type* of gay, lesbian and queer visibility broadcast are significantly determined by the brand identity or

---

[89] Ibid, pp86-7.
[90] Ibid.
[91] I wish to return in subsequent chapters to the issues surrounding digitisation and to the redefinition of public service broadcasting in the digital age, particularly in reference to Channel 4 and the BBC, which have traditionally been leading providers of public service television in the UK.

identities of each individual broadcaster. A given channel's brand identity, as Jane Arthurs notes, functions "to establish expectations among viewers of the type of programmes it will offer and the manner in which they will be addressed."[92] As Christine Fanthome suggests, it "promotes channel differentiation" in the broadcast market, and so "represents a key weapon in the battle for the audience."[93] Brand identity also, as she observes, "publicises the schedule" of the individual channel, thereby marketing its content and implicitly its values to potential viewers.[94] A channel's brand identity prepares audiences for the programmes it intends to deliver. A strong channel brand identity would therefore indicate to viewers and potential viewers precisely what kind of gay, lesbian and queer programme content they should expect it to deliver, if any. Television branding has of course also been affected by digitisation. As the number of digital channels available for terrestrial viewing have increased, so it has become necessary for individual channels to distinguish themselves from one another in what is now an increasingly competitive market, by showcasing their commitment to cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity or, in some cases, by proclaiming the traditionalism and moral conservatism of their editorial policy. Arthurs points to the subscription channel UKG2 as an example of a channel whose marketing strategy and subsequent brand identity hinged upon a disavowal of "sleaze" and overt demonstrations of sexuality.[95] Indeed, as the later case studies demonstrate, the multi-channel environment has allowed certain broadcasters to establish and nurture for some of their channels brand identities which rely heavily on the promotion of specific kinds of gay, lesbian and queer programming. As Andrew Crisell speculated in 2002,

---

[92] Jane Arthurs, *Television and Sexuality*, p24.
[93] Christine Fanthome, *Channel 5: The Early Years*, p119. Luton: University of Luton Press, 2003.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Jane Arthurs, *Television and Sexuality*, p24.

It is likely that the abundance of digital channels will not only increase demand for content but sharpen competition for audiences. With more and more broadcasters chasing a fairly static body of viewers […] it will make sense for many to seek a niche through theming or specialisation.[96]

The "traditional generalist, mixed" channels were he suggested "well suited to an era of broadcasting shortage." However,

when there is a vast choice of channels the audience for such a network can no longer be reliably predicted: mixed programming can create wild fluctuations in its size. In contrast, specialization in a single, recognizable form of output assures constant viewing […] figures and a steady revenue stream, while those who enjoy that form of output are spared the need to hunt for it over scores of channels or wait for a mixed programme network to feature it.[97]

As Arthurs' UKG2 example attests, such "specialisation" is now rife even in terrestrial digital broadcasting, resulting in a significant increase in strong channel brand identities, and an equally significant drop in "generalist" broadcast providers. The continuing survival of public service obligations (all be they obligations weakened by free-market ideologies) have thus far prevented British terrestrial broadcasters from narrowcasting: that is, from marketing a given channel or channels at a specialised demographic, as do such US broadcasting services as The God Channel (aimed at

[96] Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting: Second Edition*, p280. London: Routledge, 2002.
[97] Ibid, pp280-1.

Christians) and BET (aimed at African-Americans), as well as such UK subscription service providers as Men and Motors (aimed at heterosexual male car-owners) and MATV (aimed at Anglo-Asians). Public service remits have stemmed for now the possible development, at least on a free-to air basis, of any niche market entertainment channel aimed specifically at gay and lesbian viewers, as are subscription channels here! and Logo in the USA.[98] Branding and narrowcasting, however, are related concepts, since both exist somewhere along the spectrum of channel specialisation. As the development of such youth-oriented terrestrial channels as E4 and BBC3 demonstrate, public service broadcasters in the UK are unafraid to specialise in the current cultural climate.

Addressing the relevance of public service broadcasting and the regulation of programme content in laissez-faire markets, Arthurs asks,

> What cultural rights do minority sexual cultures have to be represented, to have a voice in the factual and fictional output of television? How much control should they have over precisely how they are represented in a culture where historically they have been subject to stigmatisation? [...] How should television institutions negotiate their responsibilities to these groups in a context where large segments of the population object strongly to seeing homosexual or other 'deviant' sexual practices portrayed in a positive light?[99]

The "rights" of gay, lesbian, queer and minority sexual audiences to on screen visibility since the early 2000s also have been determined to a significant extent by two events

---

[98] In fact, a UK- based channel named Gay TV is currently available as a digital subscription service in Britain. Its content, however, is exclusively pornographic.
[99] Jane Arthurs, *Television and Sexuality*, pp26-7.

which David Hesmondhalgh and others identify as among "the most important products so far of the Labour government's media and communications policy."[100] These are the enactment of the Communications Act 2003, and the subsequent establishment of Ofcom, the Office of Communications. Both events functioned to establish the standards of taste, decency and acceptability by which British broadcasters were forced to abide. Both, crucially, were brought about by the same Third Way reasoning that informed the Blair government's policy on sexuality and sexual identity.

Ofcom and the Communications Act 2003

In terms of its impact on British gay, lesbian and queer programming, the Communications Act 2003 served two purposes. It introduced Ofcom as the official regulatory body governing UK broadcasting (amalgamating and replacing the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC), the Independent Television Commission (ITC), Oftel, the Radio Authority and the Radiocommunications Agency), and it redefined existing public service obligations as they applied to terrestrial broadcasters. The Act defines three of the purposes of public service broadcasting in Britain as

> (a). the provision of relevant television services which secure that programmes dealing with a wide range of subject- matters are made available for viewing;

---

[100] David Hesmondhalgh, 'Media and cultural policy as public policy,' p96. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 11:1, 2005.

(b) the provision of relevant television services in a manner which (having regard to the days on which they are shown and time of day on which they are shown) is likely to meet the needs and satisfy the interests of as many different audiences as practicable;

(c) the provision of relevant television services which (taken together and having regard to the same matters) are properly balanced, so far as their nature and subject-matters are concerned, for meeting the needs and satisfying the interests of the available audiences. [101]

In order to fulfil these purposes, the Act specifies that all (commercial and licence fee sustained) channels ensure "that cultural activity in the United Kingdom, and its diversity, are reflected, supported and stimulated by the representation in those services," and that "those services (taken together) include what appears to Ofcom to be a sufficient quantity of programmes that reflect the lives and concerns of different communities and cultural interests and traditions within the United Kingdom."[102] More detailed public service remits for the BBC and the minority-oriented Channel 4 are laid out in later sections of the legislation, and these are addressed at greater length in subsequent chapters. Taken as a whole, though, the public service obligations for terrestrial broadcasters determined by the Act concerned issues of balance and fairness, and the representation of cultural diversity. Here it stood in marked contrast to its most prominent contemporary precursor, the Broadcasting Act 1990. Pushed through Parliament by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, the Broadcasting Act's sections on broadcasting codes of conduct (as enforced at that point by the Broadcasting

---

[101] Communications Act 2003 (c.21)
[102] Ibid.

Standards Council) dwelt heavily, not upon the need for on screen multicultural visibility or the accurate representation of minority groups, but upon the identification and eradication of obscene or inappropriately sexual material, and the maintenance of on-air standards of "taste and decency."[103]

The 2003 Act's emphasis on the broadcast promotion of cultural diversity, encompassing the on screen representation of gays and lesbians, dovetailed neatly with the goals of the Third Way, as outlined by Blair prior to his election. Media visibility as engendered through cultural policy constituted a further 'right,' afforded to those British gays and lesbians (as well as myriad other potentially profitable minority groups) whom New Labour sought to assimilate into the cultural and economic mainstream. The impact of Third Way thinking upon the terms of the Act does not end there, however.

The establishment of Ofcom as a cross-media regulator was on the face of things necessitated by the rapid growth since the mid-1990s of digital technologies, and thus the inevitability of media convergence. A single organisation regulating across media platforms seemed, as Paul Smith notes, "a fairly straightforward response by UK policy–makers to the convergence of television, telecommunications and computing technologies facilitated by digitisation."[104] As Smith also observes, though, Ofcom's creation simultaneously served to facilitate another goal wholly in keeping with Blair's Thatcher-inspired neoliberal ideology, namely the partial *de*regulation of the mass communications market. This inevitably had serious consequences for public service

---

[103] Broadcasting Act 1990 (c.42).
[104] Paul Smith, 'The Politics of UK television policy: The making of Ofcom,' p929. Media, Culture and Society 28:6, 2006.

broadcasting in the UK.[105] The Act cites among the main duties of Ofcom a regard not only for "the desirability of promoting the fulfilment of the purposes of public service television broadcasting in the United Kingdom," but also for "the desirability of promoting competition in relevant markets" and "the desirability of promoting and facilitating the development and use of effective forms of self-regulation." Both objectives are telling, the latter especially so owing to its suggestion that market forces, even in a broadcasting climate historically ruled by public service obligations, would amount to the self- regulation of the telecommunications industry, if undisturbed by external regulatory bodies. Ofcom, where possible, was to leave well alone. For this reason, Ofcom has been termed a 'light touch' regulator, by Jane Arthurs among others, a regulator whose "primary concern" was not to oversee media content, but to advance "the British industry's place in the global market" through the promotion of commercial investment in British communications.[106]

That the Act synthesised these two seemingly paradoxical elements, a regard for public service broadcasting and multicultural "representation" on the one hand and on the other a laissez-faire economic approach to the communications market, only outlines its relationship to the overarching Third Way principle. It was, as Sylvia Harvey puts its, "torn between civic and market principles," very much like the government under which it emerged.[107] Like so many other policies instituted under Blair's leadership, New Labour's broadcasting policy was a hybrid, a chimera, blending old-school fiscal conservatism with a regard for the social inclusion of minorities, albeit, as discussed, as

[105] Ibid, p930.
[106] Jane Arthurs, Television and Sexuality, p30.
[107] Sylvia Harvey, 'Ofcom's first year and neoliberalism's blind spot: attacking the culture of production,' p95. Screen 47:1, 2006.

a means of cultivating further economic contribution. Paul Smith draws attention to the "new, 'three-tier' system of public service orientated content regulation" proposed in an earlier 2000 government white paper on communications, a system that heavily influenced the terms of the 2003 Act, and that serves to more fully outline the nature of the Third Way synthesis, in particular as it impacted upon broadcasting policy.[108]

> Under the first tier, Ofcom would subject all broadcasters to a 'basic level' of content regulation, such as regulations on 'negative content,' advertising and sponsorship and access for people with disabilities […]; the second would require public service broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and to a lesser extent Channel 5) to deliver 'those public service obligations which are easily quantifiable and measurable,' such as quotas for independent and original production, regional programming targets and the 'the availability of news and current affairs in peak time' […] and finally, under the third tier, the more difficult to quantify 'qualitative public service remit of broadcasters' would be regulated via statements of programme policy and other self-regulatory mechanisms, with Ofcom only intervening as a last resort with 'backstop powers' to enforce the delivery of public service objectives.[109]

Again, Ofcom is characterised as "soft touch" in its approach to the regulation of broadcast material. The onus is placed on individual UK broadcasters to establish their own parameters of taste, decency and fair representation, to articulate these parameters via the statements of programme policy to which Smith refers, and to enforce them through in-house filtering and editing means. "Qualitative" in this context might just as

---

[108] Paul Smith, 'The Politics of UK television policy,' p936.
[109] Ibid.

easily read "subjective," inasmuch as the terms of each broadcaster's public service remit have been to some extent externally determined, and only negotiated with Ofcom as "a last resort." A pessimist might have regarded the logical conclusion of this institutional self-policing as the steady erosion of the more arduous public service obligations, as individual channels and broadcasters quest for higher ratings by appealing to broad-stroke tastes and wider audiences, rather than specialist interests or minority cultures.[110] The same pessimist might also have speculated that gay, lesbian queer audiences, or at the very least unassimilated queer audiences, would have been among the first casualties. Indeed, a number of arguments propounding this view have been made, and are elaborated upon further in the following chapters. Whatever the consequences, though, the Act certainly appeared to privilege market forces above state intervention in the policing of public service providers, if only by awarding them the authority to effectively police their own broadcasting output.

Conclusions

The policy and legislative amendments examined above served both to articulate the Blair government's response to social, economic and technological changes, and to accelerate the pace at which these changes occurred. Both sets of policy have impacted upon the production of gay, lesbian and queer television in the last decade, broadcasting

---

[110] Harvey makes a very similar point in her critique of Ofcom as a public service regulator. Speaking of the regulator's "difficulties in engaging with issues of culture and content," she asserts that, while the Broadcasting Act which spawned it "seeks to make provision for […] distinctive cultural needs," its terms are such as to privilege "the consumer," whose desires must be met by a competitive marketplace, above "the citizen," whose needs ought to be fairly met by a state- controlled public service provider ('Ofcom's first year,' pp93-8). By implicitly distinguishing between "the consumer" and "the citizen," the Act further illustrates the underlying tension between state and commerce, public ownership and privatisation which characterised Blair's government and its approach to communications legislation.

policy directly through establishing guidelines to determine television form and content, and social policy more indirectly but no less significantly by contributing to the shaping of a cultural climate wherein gay, lesbian and queer material might be deemed acceptable for broadcast.

The following chapters address the role played in increasing gay, lesbian and queer visibility on British television by two other, equally significant and interrelated determinants: channel brand identity, and institutional policy. As discussed above, individual channel brand identities have evolved more strongly since 1997 in part as a result of digitisation and the government's pioneering approach to digital broadcasting. The public service obligations laid out in the 2003 Communications Act and elsewhere have also to an extent determined what terrestrial broadcasters have or have not, and could or could not allow on screen. However, since the Act specifies that each broadcaster's specific public service position be outlined in its statement of programme policy, and since Ofcom relies heavily on the willingness of broadcasters to regulate their own output, the contribution of individual broadcasting institutions to the sexual liberalisation (if not the queering) of British television since the 1990s should not be overlooked. With this in mind, the following chapters will examine each of the existing UK terrestrial broadcasters in turn, with a view to assessing the true extent of this contribution. Each chapter seeks to more fully articulate the impact of in house production, commissioning and broadcasting policy on the mode and frequency of contemporary gay, lesbian and queer programming.

<u>Chapter 3. From Minority to Mainstream: Channel 4's Queer Television</u>

Since its launch in 1982, Channel 4 has operated under a remit that demands that it serves the "tastes and interests not generally catered for" by other UK broadcasters.[1] Owing to a professed "commitment to diversity," C4 has ostensibly sought in the decades since its inception to make provision in its programming for under-represented groups, including ethnic and sexual minorities.[2] The requirements of gay, lesbian and queer audiences have been, as a result, better addressed by 4 than by any other terrestrial channel. While LGBT and queer content has far from saturated its schedules, C4 has at least attempted to articulate a response to the viewing needs and desires of an increasingly visible queer community, if only by acknowledging that such a community exists, and should be represented in a percentage of its shows.[3]

This chapter focuses primarily on three recent, high-profile examples of Channel 4's gay, lesbian and queer-themed programming: *Queer as Folk*, *Sugar Rush* and *Skins*. It aims to examine the shows individually with a view to assessing their contribution to the post-1997 television landscape, and to investigate their relationship both to the channel's brand identity, and to more nebulous but still ongoing changes to the British cultural climate regarding sexuality and sexual difference. It focuses particularly on the ideas of commodification and cosmopolitanism as recurring themes in Channel 4's

---

[1] Georgina Born, 'Strategy, positioning and projection in digital television: Channel 4 and the commercialisation of public service broadcasting in the UK.' *Media, Culture & Society*, 25 (6) 2003, p.778.
[2] *Channel 4 Television Corporation Report and Financial Statements* 1985, p8. London: Channel 4, 1985.
[3] For the purposes of clarity, given its numerous subsidiary channels, the broadcasting company Channel 4 will hereafter be referred to as "Channel 4," "the Channel 4 Corporation" or simply "the Corporation," as distinct from its primary channel, hereafter referred to as C4.

contemporary gay, lesbian and queer programming, and assesses how these ideas relate to the assimilation and mainstreaming of homosexuality on C4 and its digital subsidiaries.

C4: Policy, Management and Brand Identity

As the introductory section of this project suggests, Channel 4 more than any other terrestrial service provider has provided scope within its programming for the representation of sexual minorities. The public service broadcasting (PSB) remit for C4 as articulated in the 1990 Broadcasting Act stipulated that the channel's programmes "contain a suitable proportion of matter calculated to appeal to tastes and interests not generally catered for by Channel 3."[4] The 2003 Communications Act passed by the Blair government thirteen years later similarly outlined Channel 4's public service obligations, although subtle changes in the wording of these obligations reveal much about Labour's intentions surrounding the social integration of (certain) minority groups. The Communications Act stipulated that C4 provide

> a broad range of high quality and diverse programming which, in particular—

> (a) demonstrates innovation, experiment and creativity in the form and content of programmes;

> (b) appeals to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society;

---

[4] *Broadcasting Act 1990* (c.42).

(c) makes a significant contribution to meeting the need for the licensed public service

channels to include programmes of an educational nature and other programmes of

educative value; and

(d) exhibits a distinctive character. [5]

Where before, C4 had been obliged to provide programming "not generally catered for

by [the commercial] Channel 3," now it was deemed necessary only for it to "[appeal] to

the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society."[6] As the previous chapter

suggests, for those responsible for the later legislation, "minority" had ceased by 2003 to

necessarily denote outsider status in contemporary Britain. Groups formerly regarded as

minorities, like gay men and lesbians, had ostensibly been at least partially assimilated

into the wider "culturally diverse" Britain. This linguistic shift, from "tastes and interests

not generally catered for" to "the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society"

illustrates what is the overarching theme of this chapter: Channel 4's steady

mainstreaming of gay and lesbian issues and characterisations in its fictional narrative

programming.[7]

As Georgina Born observes however, the PSB remits supplied by successive government

Acts were not the only imperatives underlying Channel 4's programming decisions. [8] As

a commercially-funded broadcaster, Channel 4 must also seek funding from advertisers

to secure its future existence. To make programmes, it must also make money. In order

---

[5] *Communications Act 2003* (c.21).
[6] Ibid.
[7] A similar linguistic shift is apparent in the public service remits of the BBC as defined by the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the later Communications Act, and is explored in detail in the following chapter.
[8] Georgina Born, 'Strategy, positioning and projection in digital television.'

to invest in material, and so continue to air the requisite "high quality and diverse programming," it must generate revenue by attracting sponsors and, in order to appear attractive to these sponsors, it must demonstrate a sustained appeal to specific demographic groups. It is therefore necessary for the Corporation to target these groups, and market itself to them according to their perceived desires and demands.[9]

Channel 4's key audiences, 16-34s and the educated middle classes, are catered for as of 2009 by three main entertainment channels, each with a specific brand identity.[10] The original C4 aspires to attract a mix of viewers from both the liberal intelligentsia and the youth markets, while More4 provides "provocative, thought-provoking and entertaining programming" for the "smart, upmarket, sophisticated [..,] affluent, well- travelled, cultured, image-conscious and socially active viewer"; E4 is "aimed at 16-34s and mainly focusing on entertainment."[11] Youth viewers comprise a significant percentage of Channel 4's overall audience. The overall brand identity of the Corporation therefore has been modified in recent years to appeal more directly to younger audiences, and to certain imagined ideological and lifestyle aspects of British youth culture. As the later case studies demonstrate, this modification has manifested most overtly in its programming since 1997.

---

[9] The relationship between Channel 4 and its sponsors is complex and multifaceted, particularly given that it is only since 1998 that the broadcaster and its channels has been required to exist eclusively on its own advertising revenues, sponsorship and any mechandising and programme and video/DVD sales it generates, having been funded previously by ITV (by providing advertising space to the network) and by licence fee assistance. For the purposes of brevity however this chapter will focus on advertising and sponsorship on C4 only tangentially, as it relates to programme-content and the creation and consolidation of brand identity.
[10] Excluding Film4, which shows only films, and no original made-for-television programming.
[11] Scheduling Digital Channels' at Channel4.com
<http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/W/wtc4/scheduling/digital.html> [03/01/08].

Born posits two assumptions on the part of Channel 4 about the younger viewers whom it covets: first, that they "desire above all entertainment programming," and second, that for them, "'minorities' are no longer meaningful social categories."[12] The Corporation itself also deems 16-24 year old ABC1s "the highest spending consumers in the UK," identifying them as among the groups "most valuable to advertisers."[13] Collectively, these three hypotheses are significant in terms of the lesbian, gay and queer programme content of C4 and the other Channel 4 digital subsidiaries. Taken at face value, young audiences' rejection of any minority status would extend to an assimilation of same-sex desire into their conceptions of the normal and the everyday. Homosexuality by this logic is to younger viewers an altogether routine occurrence, ethically indistinguishable from heterosexuality. It also suggests more relaxed attitudes to sexual fluidity on the part of the 16-24 market than in their older counterparts. Similarly, the identification of this market as consumerist, as most likely to have and spend a high disposable income (often on costly "new technologies") implies the further assumption on the Corporation's part that young Britons want to see this consumerism reflected back at them in their chosen viewing.[14] Channel 4 reasons that youth audiences, as serious consumers of stylish, modern but non-essential goods and services, are apt to favour television characters and programme scenarios with which they can identify.

---

[12] Georgina Born, 'Strategy, positioning and projection in digital television,' p793-4.
[13] The Channel 4 Audience' at Channel4.com
<http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/W/wtc4/audience/c4audience.html#upmarket>
[03/01/08].
[14] Ibid.

Channel 4's construction of 16-24s as consumerist in their relationship to material things and cosmopolitan in their attitude to sexual difference has led directly to the commissioning of programmes that normalise sexual difference and frame this difference in relation to consumer choices. Shows like *Queer as Folk* and *Sugar Rush*, discussed later in this chapter, are populated by specific kinds of overtly *consuming* gay, lesbian and queer characters, characters who in the barest terms dress well, work out frequently and accessorise their homes and bodies with capitalist abandon. Like the assimilated representations of non-hetero sexuality so prevalent on the BBC since the mid 1990s (also discussed in some detail in Chapter 4), Channel 4's LGBT and queer characters do little to trouble the neoliberal values of contemporary Britain. They are "good homosexuals" rather than "dangerous queers," assimilated into the mainstream in part through their participation in consumer culture. I return to this point in the following section of this chapter.

Alterations in government policy on sexual behaviour and identity since 1997 have sought, as Chapter 2 suggests, to integrate gays and lesbians into the British cultural and economic mainstream. These have contributed to the creation of a cultural climate wherein gay, lesbian and queer themed television might be produced and broadcast uncontroversially. They have also impacted upon Channel 4's brand identity, and on the types of gay, lesbian and queer programming it has favoured since the 1990s. This brand identity however has also been affected by certain institutional changes within the Channel 4 Corporation, and specifically personnel changes within its management team. The selection of Michael Jackson, a Labour supporter, as Chief Executive in 1997 marked an important step towards greater gay and lesbian media visibility on C4 and

the other Channel 4 channels later established. Historically, Jackson had demonstrated sustained commitment to the promotion of an equal opportunities agenda. During his time as controller of BBC2, for example, he not only chaired the equality-led Directorate Implementation Group, but instigated the commissioning of "sophisticated academic research […] both about the representation of ethnic and other minorities on screen, and about the responses of different minority audiences to those representations."[15] Under his leadership, as he later remarked, C4 played a part in orchestrating,

> a fundamental shift in the relationship between television and its audiences […] Twenty years ago television didn't honestly reflect society. Channel 4 was launched in 1982 to give a voice to those who were under-represented on the three channels which then existed. In 2001 the 'minorities' of those times have been assimilated into the mainstream of society.[16]

Jackson's appointment signalled the start of a period of transformation for Channel 4.[17] It was recognisably the point at which the Corporation began the move away from what Jackson termed "a 1960s liberal agenda" and towards a more nebulous ideological position that, like the Blair government's, encompassed both free market values and the promotion of cultural diversity.[18] Instructed by his predecessor Michael Grade to completely overhaul the channel, Jackson took it as his mission to create television that

---

[15] Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*, p201. London: Secker and Warburg, 2004.

[16] 'The Fourth Way.' *Guardian*, 29th July 2001

[17] During a meeting in Rugby a year or so after his election in 1983, Smith is reported to have announced, "My name is Chris Smith, I'm the Labour MP for Islington South, and I'm gay" to a five minute standing ovation, so becoming Britain's first openly-gay Member of Parliament (Terry Sanderson, *Mediawatch*, p116).

[18] 'The House that Jacko Built.' *Guardian*, 29th October 2001.

"honestly [reflected] society" and that acknowledged the "sea change in social values and the way individuals identify themselves within society" which he perceived as having taken place in Britain since C4's creation in 1982.[19] The Britain of the late 1990s, as he saw it, was "more cosmopolitan, less polarised" than it had been in the early 1980s. For him, Channel 4 no longer needed to function primarily as a vehicle for outsider identities and minority voices, since the outsiders and minorities for whom the Corporation had once catered were fast being integrated into the cultural mainstream.

C4, under Jackson's aegis, broadcast more gay, lesbian and queer themed material than ever before, entirely in keeping with his belief that homosexuality and the gay community constituted a significant but unremarkable part of contemporary British culture. In 1998 *Queer Street*, which drew together a variety of disparate films, shorts and documentaries on a gay/ lesbian/ bisexual theme, was commissioned for a second season, and ran for four consecutive weekends over the summer. Earlier that year, in a similar vein, C4 staged an evening long collection of gay and lesbian-centric programmes to mark the coming out of American comedian Ellen Degeneres and her sitcom alter-ego Ellen Morgan, hosted by (among others) Graham Norton. Norton's own late-night comedy talk-show vehicle, *So Graham Norton* (1998-2003) began the following July, and proved tremendously successful. Much of the show's humour took as its basis Norton's own homosexuality, in particular his campness. Richard Dyer identifies camp as "the only style, language and culture that is unambiguously gay

---

[19] 'The Fourth Way.'

male."[20] On this basis, the signifiers Norton offered up to 4's viewer were unambiguous altogether, and utterly denotative of his sexual orientation. From the brightness of his many outfits, to the excited flailing of his lower arms and wrists, to his exaggerated pronouncement of any number of male guests as "gorgeous," to his innuendo-laden interaction with the bare- chested musclemen responsible for leading his interviewees to the couch, there could be no mistaking his sexual identity. Norton, like his show, was unapologetically gay, with the result that his guests as well as the studio audience with whom he interacted, could do one of only two things in the face of his homosexuality: accept it with grace and good humour, or suffer the host's scathing rebuttal and a subsequent, very public ridicule. Uniquely for a terrestrial programme at the time, *So Graham Norton* presented the public with an entertainment arena wherein homophobia, indeed anything less than the wholehearted embrace of homosexuality, was the aberration, rather than the norm.

The reality television genre also flourished on C4 under Jackson, and presented further opportunity for the prime-time representation of non-hetero sexualities. Reality television, Christopher Pullen notes, has increasingly "taken [the LGBT and queer] 'outsider identity' and seemingly welcomed it into the space of the living room."[21] Beginning in May 2000, C4's reality game show *Big Brother* featured in its first two seasons at least five gay, lesbian and bisexual contestants, two of whom (Anna Nolan and Brian Dowling) went on to establish reasonably successful television careers, and

---

[20] Richard Dyer, 'It's Being So Camp as Keeps Us Going,' p110. Ed. Fabio Cleto, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.
[21] Christopher Pullen, 'The Household, the Basement and The Real World: Gay identity in the constructed reality environment,' p211. Eds. Su Holmes, Deborah Jermyn, *Understanding Reality Television*. London: Routledge, 2004.

one of whom (Dowling) succeeded in garnering enough popularity votes among audiences to win the competition. Subsequent seasons have seen a raft of gay, lesbian and queer individuals participate: Adele (*Big Brother 3*), Daniel, Kitten, Emma, Marco and popular transsexual Nadia (*BB5*), Derek, Craig and transvestite Kemal (*BB6*), Richard, Shabaz and pre-op transwoman Sam (*BB7*) and Carole, Gerry and Seany (*BB8*), to name a few. Inevitably, the show is open to accusations of, as Pullen puts it, "offering the visibility of both gay identity and 'sexual non-conformists' for vicarious entertainment."[22] However, the show has presented to its audience a diversity of gay, lesbian and queer lives and experiences. For all its prurient, ratings- grabbing attention to the young, toned and extrovert, *Big Brother* has proven surprisingly nuanced in its gender politics, delivering gay, lesbian and queer bodies and images of a kind not often witnessed on prime-time television. These have included older gay men, black and ethnic minority gays, lesbians and bisexuals, transvestites and the transgendered. Both the nature of the reality-show format and the sheer duration of the competition (two months, rising to three by 2007, broadcast several times a day on C4 and its subsidiary digital channels) afforded audiences at least some insight into the characters of the contestants, allowing the individual participants to evolve beyond wan stereotypes.

Jackson also spearheaded C4's recent heavy investment in imported US series, a focus that has itself helped to redefine Channel 4's brand identity and so its attitude to gay, lesbian and queer programming. Paul Rixon observes that, since the 1990s, Channel 4 has sought to appeal to youth and affluent middle class audiences sympathetic to its "minority" television remit specifically through the broadcast of imported American

---

[22] Ibid.

comedy and drama, regarded within C4 as "a rich vein of programming."[23] Such programmes, he suggests, "fitted C4's brand of serving up good quality, slightly innovative cutting-edge drama."[24] This "slight innovation" manifested in their content, as much as in their style, and particularly in their treatment of sexuality, sexual diversity and, most pertinently, queer and LGBT issues. Brief discussion of this content is therefore necessary in order to better illustrate the industrial and broadcasting context and climate out of which *Queer as Folk*, and subsequently *Sugar Rush* and *Skins* emerged.

The arrival of *Queer as Folk* on British screens in 1999 coincided roughly with C4's acquisition of a number of high-profile US imports: legal fantasy *Ally McBeal*, prison saga *Oz* (HBO, 1997-2003) and teen-oriented *Dawson's Creek* (WB, 1998-2003) in 1998, and *Sex and the City* in 1999. *Sex and the City*, a comedy-drama focusing on the sex lives of four Manhattan-based women purchased from the subscription-only HBO channel, premiered in the UK only a fortnight before *Queer as Folk*, and seemed to foreshadow some of its thematic concerns. Glyn Davis notes that,

> The overt sexual content of *Queer as Folk* provides a link between the series and *Sex and the City*- indeed, their appearance on British television at almost the same time seems serendipitous. Not only did both programmes appeal to both straight women and gay men, but both challenged televisual regimes regarding depictions of sexual behaviour and sexual language. Almost all of the main characters in the two series had frequent,

---

[23] Paul Rixon, *American Television on British Screens: A Story of Cultural Interaction*, p52. Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
[24] Ibid, p53.

graphically depicted sex; and almost all talked honestly and directly about sex in ways never previously shown on television.[25]

The unrestrained explorations of female sexuality within such shows as *Sex and the City* have been termed postfeminist in certain quarters, in that they conflate feminist notions of sexual liberation and equality with postmodern concerns regarding the rigidity of sex and gender roles. Of the show's four leads, the character Samantha (Kim Cattrall) might be deemed particularly "postfeminist," in that she exhibits both traditionally 'male' and 'female' traits, "[going] out and [having] sex like a man" while maintaining a 'feminine' interest in shoes and high fashion. Her sexual assertiveness serves to undermine the active male/passive female binary. Although she may be *like* a man in some respects, she is, as the many shots of her naked body perfectly illustrate throughout the series, *not* a man, but rather a hybridisation of typically gendered traits. *Ally McBeal*'s Renee (Lisa Nicole Carson) performs much the same function. Powerful, ruthless and successful as any male counterpart in her position as District Attorney and wholly sexually-confident in her personal life, she is frequently shown to exploit her sexuality and physicality to her advantage in the courtroom through the deployment of makeup and revealing clothes. In demonstrating the inadequacy of binary pairings as a means of encompassing the diversity of human experience, the programmes challenge their audiences to assess and reconfigure their own preconceptions of sex and gender roles, smoothing a path for the reception of a show like *Queer as Folk*. The suggestion that a man may be *like* a woman, in having sex with other men, but biologically *not* a woman seems significant in preparing the viewer for *Queer as Folk*'s many male/male couplings.

---

[25] Glyn Davis, *BFI TV Classics: Queer as Folk*, p42. London: BFI, 2007.

Oz and *Dawson's Creek* similarly offset the sexuality of *Queer as Folk* by presenting

their audiences with radically different but nonetheless complementary experiences of

queer behaviour and identity. Typically for a drama set within the confines of a male

prison, *Oz* contained innumerable scenes of (often explicit) male-on-male sexual

violence. One pivotal plotline centred on the rape and routine sexual humiliation of a

new prisoner, Beecher (Lee Tergesen), by his cellmate Schillinger (J. K. Simmons).

Another, in series two, saw the Nigerian Adebisi (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje) assault

and sodomise the Italian Peter Schibetta (Eddie Malavarca) as an act of gang warfare.

However, not all of *Oz*'s sexuality was non-consensual, nor did it all conflate male/male

sex and gay existence with brutality and sadomasochism. While Beecher's romantic

involvement with the psychotic bisexual Keller (Chris Meloni) from series two onwards

was punctuated by extreme acts of aggression and violent betrayal from both characters,

the relationship was also informed, as Joe Wlodarz suggests, by a tenderness and an

erotic tension rarely present in the prison drama genre.[26]

Wlodarz observes that, "prisons simultaneously displace heterocentric social structures

and glorify homosocial relations," and certainly within *Oz*'s narrative, a significant

percentage of the male/male sexual sexuality on display is demonstrably situation-

specific.[27] Many of the characters participating in male/male sex did not identify as gay

outside of the prison. As the (ostensibly heterosexual) Adebisi declares to another

prisoner in the third series, "sometimes you just need your dick sucked." Unlike many

---

[26] Joe Wlodarz, 'Maximum Insecurity: Genre Trouble and Closet Erotics in and out of HBO's *Oz.*' *Camera Obscura* 20:1, 2005.
[27] Ibid, p70.

other gay, lesbian and queer themed programmes broadcast on C4 at that time, Oz eschewed assimilationist representations of non-hetero sexuality and of sexual identity, although as Wlodarz notes, this may be attributed to the artificiality of the prison setting and the necessary absence of female characters. The kind of non-hetero sexuality featured in *Dawson's Creek* was, by contrast, less a matter of sexual behaviour than of identity and ontology. The coming-out of sixteen year old Jack McPhee (Kerr Smith) in season two was expressed exclusively through verbal confirmations of his homosexuality, a series of similarly worded "I am" statements, and supplemented by little in the way of sexual behaviour, or indeed sexual desire. This was in part because, as Davis remarks, its "containment within the genre form of 'youth television' restricted the explicit content depicted."[28]

The gay, lesbian and queer content of other long-running US imports on C4 similarly acted as precursors to *Queer as Folk*'s foregrounding of gay sexual activity. The sitcoms *Friends* (NBC, 1994) and *Frasier* (NBC, 1993), broadcast throughout the 1990s, were particularly vocal in their acknowledgement of gay and lesbian themes. Neither show explicitly engaged with gay issues or introduced major gay characters, although both featured gay and lesbian characters in minor recurring roles. Rather, both were notable for their persistent, anxious negotiation of social mores and practices in an increasingly sexually-diverse world, for exhibiting what Ron Becker terms "straight panic."[29] Straight panic as Becker defines it "refers to the growing anxiety of a heterosexual culture and straight individuals confronting this shifting social landscape where categories of sexual

---

[28] Davis, *Queer as Folk*, p39.
[29] Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America*, p4. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006.

identity were repeatedly scrutinised and traditional moral hierarchies regulating sexuality were challenged."[30] In the context of contemporary American sitcoms, this anxiety played out most frequently in moments of mistaken identity, or rather mistaken *sexual* identity, wherein a principal heterosexual character was imagined to be gay by a third party, with hilarious consequences.

Becker points to a season two episode of *Frasier*, 'The Matchmaker,' as illustrative of the straight panic phenomenon. Broadcast on C4 in 1995, 'The Matchmaker' finds the show's protagonist Frasier Crane (Kelsey Grammer) mistaken for a gay man by his new boss, with whom, through a series of comic misunderstandings, he ultimately ends up on a date. Other episodes of the series also featured moments of straight panic precipitated by a gay or lesbian outsider, and often raised questions about the sexualities of the characters in panic before reaffirming their heterosexuality, in full or in part. Season four's 'The Impossible Dream,' shown on 4 in 1997, demonstrates this well. Frasier, unfulfilled in his professional life as a radio psychiatrist, becomes obsessed with 'solving' an erotic dream about a closeted but screamingly camp male co-worker that plagues him throughout the episode, and that eventually causes him to query his heterosexuality. "Is it possible," he wonders, "my subconscious is trying to tell me something about my sexuality? [...] I was sensitive as a child; I didn't go in for sports. God, it's every cliché in the book." Interestingly, though he concludes consciously that the dream itself is not indicative of any latent homosexuality, the episode does not allow for a total resolution of the sexuality dilemma. The final gag, in fact, sees Frasier embroiled in further homoerotic dream action, this time as he finds himself in bed with

---

[30] Ibid.

a sexually-predatory Sigmund Freud, and leaves plenty of room for ambiguity. Later episodes depict other major characters in compromising queer situations. Season six's 'I.Q.' has Frasier's producer Roz (Peri Gilpin) agree to dinner with another woman to escape a particularly unappealing suitor, while season seven's 'Out with Dad' shows Frasier's father Martin (John Mahoney) inadvertently set up with an interested gay man. The issue of the lead character's seemingly complicated heterosexuality is addressed more fully in a much later show, season eleven's 'The Doctor is Out,' shown on C4 in 2004. Bowled over by the attentions of a successful and openly-gay opera director Alistair Burke (Patrick Stewart), Frasier finds himself unable to resist the allure of "being part of a power couple." "Is it perfect?" he asks rhetorically. "No, but it's fun, and I don't want it to end." Though the script takes pains to emphasise that the pair never actually have sex, the *possibility* of sex between men nevertheless hangs heavy over the episode, just as the *possibility* of homosexuality hangs heavy over the series as a whole.

Friends reaped similar laughs from the ambiguous sexual identity of one of its six main characters, Chandler (Matthew Perry) whose perceived effeminacy and inability to form relationships with women functioned as running jokes through the ten year course of the show. The first season episode, 'The One Where Nana Dies Twice' (broadcast on C4 in 1995) deals directly with this ambiguity. Read as gay by a colleague, Chandler seeks input from his friends as to why this might have occurred, only to be told that he possesses a non-specific "quality" that marks him as homosexual. The theme is revisited explicitly again in the season three episode, 'The One with the Flashback,' when, upon meeting Chandler for the first time, Joey (Matt LeBlanc) assures him that he is "totally

okay with the gay thing." Unlike *Frasier* however, which refused to entirely clarify its position on its lead character's sexuality, *Friends* left its audience in no doubt of Chandler's heterosexuality. He was, as his obvious attraction to women suggested and eventual marriage to a female character confirmed, only ever a straight man mistakenly identified by others as gay. In this respect, *Friends* conformed to Becker's understanding of the way in which gay material came to be "narrativised" into mainstream programming, offering its audience "the opportunity to safely explore anxieties about the indeterminate and paradoxical boundaries between gay and straight."[31]

Jackson's broadcasting policy sought to make space for minority groups within mainstream entertainment programming, to assimilate into this mainstream them rather than grant them special status. As the above discussion suggests, this resulted in an overall increase in gay, lesbian and queer visibility on C4 and the other channels during his tenure. However, the appointment of Mark Thompson as Jackson's successor in 2001 marked a temporary return to the "1960s liberal agenda" from which Channel 4 under Jackson had begun to distance itself, and one that focused greater attention on the representation of ethnic (rather than sexual) minorities.

Previously the Controller of BBC2, Thompson took C4's public service broadcasting remit seriously, committing to strengthening it as Georgina Born notes through "a renewed focus on diversity, creativity, originality and risk-taking."[32] His focus was from

---

[31] Ibid, p212.
[32] Born, 'Strategy, positioning and projection in digital television,' p792.

the outset firmly on the Corporation's main terrestrial channel, C4, rather than subsidiary channels like E4. Delivering the MacTaggart Lecture at the Edinburgh International Television Festival in 2002, he vowed that "the biggest single contribution to innovation [...] and creativity" would come from C4, though he did concede that the future of television would very likely "be broadly based across platforms and media."[33] Under Thompson's leadership, minority concerns were to be placed back at the forefront of C4's programming policy, and initially it seemed that these would encompass further increases in gay, lesbian and queer visibility across the Corporation's channels.

Thompson's stay at Channel 4, though, coincided with a related series of highly significant cultural-political events: the September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in 2001, the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and subsequent media focus on the 'radicalisation' of young British Muslims. Inevitably, these events impacted upon C4's commissioning logic, to the extent that an increased proportion of its "minority programming" quota was met by shows that engaged with religious and minority-ethnic themes. Post 9/11, the Corporation deemed audiences more likely to tune into programmes that explored the relationship between Islamic and Western cultures. Cultural diversity under Thompson therefore equated to more programmes about Islam and Muslim Britons, but significantly fewer about gays, lesbians and queers. Bar the acquisition in 2002 of US import *Six Feet Under* (2001) that featured in a lead role a gay male character in an interracial relationship, Channel 4's LGBT and queer programme content between 2001 and 2004 was negligible.

---

[33] Thompson, Mark. 'Mark Thompson's MacTaggart Lecture.' *Guardian*, 23rd August 2002.

Conversely, Islam-themed programmes proliferated. 2002 offered viewers *House of War* (2002) which documented a four-day conflict between American forces and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the *Muslim and British* season (encompassing shows like *Culture Clash* (2002), *The Hidden Jihad* (2002) and *Mum, I'm a Muslim* (2002)) and a serialised adaptation of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2002), a comedy-drama exploring Anglo-Asian, and especially Anglo-Islamic relations in contemporary Britain. 2003 likewise yielded series like *The Hajj* (2003), which followed a group of young British Muslims on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and the Anglo-Asian focused *Second Generation* (2003).

The 2003 Communications Act, passed during Thompson's time as Chief Executive, served to strengthen Channel 4's PSB remit, both explicitly and through its establishment of Ofcom, which was granted the power to fine and reprimand the Corporation, should it deviate from this remit. For Andy Duncan, who succeeded Thompson in 2004, the terms of the remit were best met through increased focus on Channel 4's digital channels. Unlike Jackson and Thompson, Duncan's background lay in marketing, rather than media production. His last position prior to 2004 had been at the BBC where, as Director of Marketing and Communications, he was credited with assisting the expansion of Freeview, the UK's free-to-air digital operator. Earlier successes, while working in advertising at Unilever, included the re-branding of Pot Noodle and the launch of I Can't Believe It's Not Butter. Speaking of Channel 4's expansion into further digital markets through the re-launching of E4 as a free-to-air rather than a subscription channel and the introduction of More4 in 2005, Duncan said,

I don't see the digital revolution as an attack on Channel 4's power as a public broadcaster. I see it as a fantastic opportunity to build on what Channel 4 has always done: stimulate, infuriate, debate, create. The difference is that we're doing it in many more ways than just via broadcast these days, because we have to engage with the public wherever they are.[34]

Like Jackson, Duncan supported the mainstreaming of gays and lesbians, and advocated that part of Channel 4's public service demands be met through the assimilation of minority identities into non-minority programming. His tenure as Chief Executive saw commissioned a number of mainstream, heavily-marketed programmes with prominent gay and lesbian characters, notably *Skins* and the award-winning *Shameless* (2004-). The US imports commissioned since his appointment have followed a similar assimilationist logic, with *Desperate Housewives* (2004-), *Nip/Tuck* (2003-) and *Ugly Betty* (2006-) all carrying gay and lesbian characters in significant secondary roles. He outlined his commitment to assimilation in 2006, arguing,

Since the beginning, Channel 4 has made a point of revealing, exploring and celebrating difference. Once narrowly categorised as "catering for minorities," diversity is now absolutely integral to our output and one of our most distinctive points of difference from other services.[35]

It is worth taking note of one anomaly in Duncan's otherwise fairly seamless assimilation of gay, lesbian and queer sexualities into the mainstream schedules,

---

[34] Andy Duncan, 'The New Statesman Media Lecture.' *New Statesman*, 26th June 2006.
[35] Ibid.

however. In 2007, he oversaw the commissioning of *40 Years Out*, a season of programmes commemorating the 40th anniversary of the legalisation of homosexuality in the UK. Among the shows featured were *A Very British Sex Scandal* (2007), which dramatised the infamous pre-Wolfenden trial of Edward Montagu and Peter Wildeblood for gross indecency, and *Clapham Junction* (2007), a single drama centring on the lives of a group of young and young-ish gay men written in response to the homophobic murder of queer barman Jody Dobrowski on Clapham Common in 2005. Both shows were overtly political, in that both engaged directly with policy and legislative issues surrounding homosexuality, specifically the legalisation of sex between men, and the need for specifically gay-themed hate crimes legislation. Moreover, by foregrounding homophobia in two very specific forms, both served to underscore the differences in lived experience between heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals, rather than facilitating further assimilation and integration through emphasis on their similarities.

This section provides a brief overview of the evolution of Channel 4's brand identities since the mid 1990s, and of the relationship of these brand identities to the Corporation's gay, lesbian and queer programming. The following case studies examine several recent examples of this programming, and assess how the content of each example accords with both the overall Channel 4 ethos and the individual brand identity of the channel on which it was first broadcast.

In and Out (of the Mainstream): *Queer as Folk* and *Metrosexuality*

In April 1999, C4 launched *Queer as Folk*, an eight-part series focusing on the personal lives of three gay men, set in and around Manchester's gay village. The programme ran for two series, and performed consistently well in ratings terms, consistently reaching between 3 and 3.5 million viewers- quite a feat, given its late-night timeslot and C4's 10% audience share.[36] Beyond that, though, it provoked a huge amount of coverage in the press, with particular attention paid to its sex scenes.

The first episode of series one began with a warning, a pre-transmission voice-over alerting the viewer to the "sex with a capital "S" and some very strong language" contained over the course of its thirty-minute run-time. The warning would be justified by the explicit depictions of sexual activity that followed. Subsequently hailed by C4 as the "highlight" of the year's dramatic output, *Queer as Folk* attracted what the channel claimed were "thousands" of calls and emails commenting on its content.[37] Some professed themselves shocked at the show's embrace of unbridled gay sexuality. Most expressed a kind of awe at the risk that C4 had taken in screening the show in the first place.

To a large extent, sex proved to be the programme's most memorable and groundbreaking feature. Unlike the later *Metrosexuality* (2001), *Queer as Folk* defined itself through its documentation of homosexuality as sexual act, through its correlation of gay identity with men fucking other men, and enjoying it. That the sex it presented as emblematic of the urban gay male experience occurs exclusively between toned white

---

[36] Figures courtesy of BARB.
[37] *Channel 4 Television Corporation Report and Financial Statements* 1999, p21. London: Channel 4, 1999.

men in their teens and twenties is incontrovertible. That the old, the overweight and the non-Caucasian feature nowhere on the queer erotic landscape that it maps is similarly evident, throughout the course of its two-series stay on C4. However, unlike the other gay, lesbian and queer-themed programmes that went before it, *Queer as Folk* delivered what Sally Munt has characterised as a kind of gay sex notable for its total absence of shame.[38]

Explicit gay sex was foregrounded as a narrative preoccupation from the very outset of the series. Before definitively establishing either character details or narrative trajectory, it presents sex: Stuart (Aiden Gillen) giving a handjob in an alleyway; Nathan (Charlie Hunnam) ejaculating over Stuart's wrist; the two of them naked and fucking; the three principals, Nathan, Stuart and Vince (Craig Kelly) delivering sex-themed monologues direct to the camera. Glyn Davis notes that "the amount of sexual activity in *Queer as Folk* diminishes across the episodes," and certainly, bar one graphically rendered threesome in the third episode, later installments lacked the explicit sexual detail of the first.[39] In this respect, the first episode functioned as the programme's mission statement, delivering on the promise of the pre-broadcast warning and firmly equating homosexuality as a concept with specific sets of unavoidably sexual activity.

Substantiating those assessments of the show as groundbreaking or pioneering in spirit, the stylistic mechanisms deployed by its producers helped to frame this sexual activity as both desirable and visually pleasing for its audience. The male bodies utilised during

---

[38] Sally R. Munt, 'Shame/pride dichotomies in Queer as Folk.' *Textual Practice* 14:3, 2000.
[39] Glyn Davis, *Queer as Folk*, p41.

the sex scenes seemed designed to stimulate aesthetically, the actors Aiden Gillen (Stuart) and Charlie Hunnam (Nathan) presumably having been selected at least in part for their tanned, toned torsos. Conversely the ridiculing upwards-pan to which Vince's beer-bellied one night stand is subject, when complemented by inter-cut shots of Vince's bemused facial expressions and the otherwise near-total erasure of the less than physically perfect from the programme's gay pick-up arena, situates queer sex as solely the province of the young and the conventionally attractive. The young gay male body is not only exalted for its beauty, but fetishised for its audience's viewing pleasure, encouraging the adoption of what Davis calls "an overtly sexualised queer gaze" that "explicitly invites viewers to use their eyes in ways comparable to the [...] gay male characters."[40] This encouragement is particularly apparent during the second Stuart/Nathan sex scene. The scene begins with a slow camera sweep of Nathan's softly-lit naked body, lying face-down on the bed in Stuart's apartment. Particular attention is paid to his back and buttocks, shot in such close-up that the hairs on his skin are noticeably visible. From the outset, he is positioned for the audience as passive, a recipient, in terms of both his sexual role (Stuart is preparing to fuck him) and his relationship with the camera. He is there, quite explicitly, to be *looked at*, to be visually consumed. Stuart in contrast acts as the facilitator of the audience's gaze: he *looks*, but is not in this instance looked at. The camera therefore focuses primarily on his face as he takes in Nathan's body, and his hungry, sexually-aroused expression anticipates the response of the scopophilic viewer. Throughout the series, Peter Billingham suggests, "Stuart is positioned and performed as playing a 'masculinised' role in relation to a 'feminised' Vince," with Vince "always defined as the 'feminised,' submissive recipient of

---

[40] Ibid, p42.

Stuart's actual and mythic gaze and desire: a phallic, penetrative ownership of Vince as subject."[41] In his interaction with Nathan, however, this "phallic, penetrative ownership" is real, rather than figurative. Stuart is quite literally inside him as the scene progresses, while the audience is encouraged to experience the encounter very much from Stuart's perspective. Through these means, a three-way power dynamic is established. Nathan, as a result is fucked not only by Stuart, but by the programme's voyeuristic audience.

By inciting its audience to take pleasure in an imagined penetration of Hunnam's character, *Queer as Folk* skirted close to other broadcasting boundaries. As of 1999, when the show was first broadcast, Section 28 remained in place and rendered discussion of homosexuality taboo in British classrooms, while the age of consent for sex between men was set at 18. Nathan is fifteen and a schoolboy, where Stuart is twenty nine. Though entirely consensual, the sex between them is also highly illegal. Viewers engaged with the show therefore were unwillingly cast as vicarious pederasts, to the apparent consternation of those who registered complaints about its content. More taboo-breaking still was its depiction of Nathan's sexual life. From the first show onwards, Nathan is shown actively seeking out sex, with Stuart, with the younger Dazz, with school bully Christian Hobbs in series one and, in series two, with a variety of mostly older men. He feels no residual guilt or shame for his underage sexual behaviour, and is neither ruined nor emotionally damaged by his encounters. Quite the reverse: his experience with Stuart is formative in the most positive of ways, allowing him to fulfil, and finally reveal his previously-hidden sexual identity. When first exposed to Stuart

---

[41] Peter Billingham, 'Can gay sex be politically correct? *Queer as Folk* and the geo-ideological inscription of gay sexuality,' p120. Ed. Jonathan Bignell, Stephen Lacey, *Popular Television Drama: Critical Perspectives*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005.

and to the audience in the opening episode, he is shy, softly-spoken and physically hunched. By the final episode of series one he has evolved into a fully-formed, if somewhat stereotypical young gay man, confident, stylishly outfitted in a selection of bold colours and assertive enough to flee his homophobic father for the bright lights of London. His youth is shown as a distinct advantage on the gay dating circuit. Rather than weakening him or rendering him easy prey for sexual predators, it empowers him and grants him access to a wider choice of sexual and romantic partners, as Dazz acknowledges when he advises him, on the subject of Stuart: "Your age, you can make him beg." That underage sex, and particularly underage queer sex, should be presented as a positive decision devoid of angst or negative consequence was in itself fairly revolutionary in the context of a show produced for mainstream terrestrial television. That *intergenerational* underage queer sex should likewise be framed neutrally was, even on Channel 4 in the late 1990s, nothing short of incendiary.

The show's sexual content, then, more than satisfied C4's remit to produce cutting-edge, experimental and risk-taking television. The series also, as Lizzie Thynne notes,

> played an important role in the attempt to rebrand Channel 4 and provides an interesting example of how 'gay' is being extensively reconstructed in some sections of the popular media as no longer a despised identity but a sexy, popular one [...] The didactic approach [to gay and lesbian issues] is now rejected [by Channel 4] in favour of

a more crossover address- programmes which focus on gay 'lifestyle' rather than identity politics and can appeal to a diverse audience.[42]

Thynne also touches upon the marketability of the gay male sexuality performed within the show. Unlike traditional lesbianism (or perhaps more specifically, lesbian feminism), the gay male sexuality of *Queer as Folk*

> [had] the advantage of being unencumbered by the politics of feminism and is already associated with stylish clubs and music, available for consumption by the young and hip audiences that the channel covets. Unlike ITV, the audience of which is older, it doesn't need to worry about 'old ladies' who might switch off. The realistic depiction of sex between women is already so heavily coded as pornographic for a straight audience, or as asexual because of its rejection of conventional femininity and/or the lack of a penis, that it presents some problems in terms of consumption. Gay men's sexuality is more easily appropriated as pleasurable and provides a daring spectacle with which [its Chief Executive can] establish Channel 4 as the rebel channel in opposition to the plethora of more restrained, paternalistic or 'safe' channels, none of which, [they claimed], would have broadcast [it...] From a marketing point of view it is not of great consequence to Channel 4 if a minority is offended, whether because of identity politics or moral disapproval.[43]

This "appropriation" of gay masculinity is safe, not only because it generates the kind of publicity apt to increase ratings amongst the coveted cosmopolitan market, but also

---

[42] Lizzie Thynne, 'Being Seen: 'the lesbian' in British television drama,' p209. Eds. David Alderson and Linda Anderson, *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
[43] Ibid, pp209-10.

because it allows for the integration into the viewing schedules of, as Thynne says, a relatively apolitical kind of non-hetero sexuality. However outrageous and unprecedented its sexual content, *Queer as Folk* also accorded with Michael Jackson's goal of mainstreaming gay and lesbian programming, of positioning it so as to appeal to cosmopolitan heterosexual audiences, as well as to gay, lesbian and queer ones. No more is this will to mainstream appeal more apparent than in the show's presentation of commodified forms of gay male identity. Among the defining features of its three central characters is their attention to aesthetic details, the emphasis that they place on looking good. All three lead characters are styled to perfection through the application of hair gel and tight fitting shirts and t- shirts. All three (even Vince, who claims a physical resemblance to the scrawny comedian Norman Wisdom) sport impeccably honed bodies and the kind of rippling musculature achievable only through frequent visits to the gym. Stuart, framed as both the best-looking and most narcissistic of the group, is shown to place chilled spoons over his eyes to replenish them after a sleepless night out and sips continually from branded bottled water as a means of re-hydrating his skin. Likewise, as discussed above, Nathan's transition from naïve teenager to out and proud gay man is delineated by his acquisition of a new wardrobe and an improved haircut. For the two older characters, looking good also extends to the purchase and exhibition of objects and accessories: expensive cars, luxury apartments, extensive video collections and gadgets like the K-9 robot-dog given by Stuart to Vince as a birthday present in episode seven of the first series. Buying and consuming incessantly preoccupy the programmes' gay male characters. Like the metrosexual first defined by Mark Simpson as "[a] single young man with a high disposable income, living or working in the city (because that's where all the best shops are)… a commodity fetishist… a collector of fantasies about the

131

male sold to him by advertising," they give the impression of spending "a substantial amount of their income on male cosmetics and clothes," and the rest on sleek but unnecessary lifestyle accoutrements[44]. This consumption is linked inextricably within the programme to their sexual identities. Stuart's expensive jeep is pigeonholed as 'gay' by a homophobic car salesmen on the basis of its popularity with gay men, who are "cutting- edge [with] money to burn," while the Manchester gay scene as *Queer As Folk* depicts it is populated only by hordes of similarly-styled and similarly moisturised young men, all questing for sex with their aesthetic equals or superiors. Homosexuality on the show's term is largely a commercialised endeavour. Good, pleasurable gay living is equated with, and reducible to the purchasing of sufficient goods and services. *Being* gay becomes, as John Champagne observes, "an upwardly-mobile, gay-male-consumerist mentality that unreflectively celebrates and eroticises the continuing commodification and objectification of gay bodies."[45]

Gay male visibility within *Queer as Folk* occurs via the stereotyped image of the gay man as a kind of hyper-consumer. Rosemary Hennessy notes that "the visibility of sexual identity is often a matter of commodification, a process that inevitably depends on the lives and labours of others"[46]. "Lifestyle consumer culture," and here specifically *gay* lifestyle consumer culture promotes as Hennessy puts it,

> a way of thinking about identity as malleable because it is open to more and more
> consumer choices rather than shaped by moral codes or rules. In this way "lifestyle"

---

[44] Mark Simpson, 'Here come the mirror men.' *Independent*, 15th November 1994.
[45] John Champagne, 'Homo Academicus.' Ed. Paul Smith, *Boys: Masculinities in Contemporary Culture.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996.
[46] Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, p111

identities can be seen to endorse the breakup of old hierarchies in favour of the rights of individuals to enjoy new pleasures without moral censure. While the coherent individual has not been displaced, increasingly new urban lifestyles promise a decentring of identity by way of consumer practices which announce that styles of life can be purchased in clothes, leisure activities, household items, and bodily disposition.[47]

This kind of commodified visibility perfectly complements Jackson's goal of assimilating sexual minorities into mainstream television programming. It presents a vision of non-hetero sexual identity contained and co-opted by neoliberal capitalist orthodoxy, its potentially disruptive elements tamed. *Queer as Folk* posed no threat to the status quo, and was unlikely to scare off mainstream heterosexual audiences with its radicalism. Despite their sexual exploits, the show's gay male characters are very much good homosexuals who actively embrace neoliberal free-market values through their consumer practices, rather than dangerous queers who seek to shatter these values and start again. At the time of the show's broadcast, their way of living accorded fully with the Blair government's policy line regarding the integration of sexual minorities (explored in detail in the previous chapter). For the Labour government under Blair, the assimilation of minority groups such as gays and lesbians into the cultural mainstream served a strong economic end by allowing them to contribute more fully financially, to wield more liberally their pink pounds. *Queer as Folk* shows individual gay male characters doing just that: asserting their identities through their spending power.

---

[47] Ibid, p133.

As has already been suggested, the show's content also served as a lure for specific kinds of mainstream, heterosexual audiences seeking a cosmopolitan viewing experience. Its characters provided these audiences the means by which to vicariously access alternative, specifically gay lifestyles, and so *feel* cosmopolitan. Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs observe that the practice of cosmopolitanism entails not only "a particular attitude towards difference" but "access to a particular form of knowledge" that allows one to "appropriate and to know the other and generate authority from this knowing."[48] *Queer as Folk* provided a window into a (fictitious) gay male subculture. In doing so, it offered heterosexual audiences the very "access" upon which this appropriation is contingent.

The show's narrative also espoused a cosmopolitan ethos, and so rendered it even more attractive to these audiences. Reinforcing John Champagne's observations on the prevalence of consumerism within gay culture, the programme situates a good proportion of its action within the bar and nightclub culture of Manchester's gay village, drawing on several real-life brands with immediate, if gay-specific name recognition. These included well-known bars like Via Fossa, Manto, the New Union Inn and nightclubs like Cruz 101 and Essential. The Canal Street area as seen in *Queer as Folk* is principally a gay male space, but open equally to sympathetic, cosmopolitan heterosexuals like Vince's mother Hazel. Within this space, the only intolerable "difference" is intolerance of diversity, a disavowal of the cosmopolitan doctrine. A scene from the final episode of the first series demonstrates this well. Nathan's tormentor, the

---

[48] Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs, 'Cosmopolitan knowledge and the production and consumption of sexualised space: Manchester's gay village,' p42. *The Sociological Review* 52:1, 2004.

homophobic Christian Hobbs (Ben Maguire), appears in a gay bar with his girlfriend,

and is spotted by Nathan, who proceeds to denounce Hobbs via the bar's karaoke

machine. Once exposed as a homophobe and a bully, Hobbs is asked to leave the

premises; having transgressed, he is no longer tolerated in a gay, cosmopolitan space.

Within the show's narrative, cosmopolitanism is equated with the acceptance of cultural

diversity, and is celebrated. Conversely, those who reject cosmopolitanism are cast

squarely in opposition to freedom of sexual expression, to social diversity and to the

modern multicultural world. The very last scene of the show, in the final episode of

series two, reinforces this point. Having left Manchester for the US, Vince and Stuart are

verbally abused at a gas station by a homophobic truck-driver (Tony Maudsley), who

identifies them as "faggots." Stuart responds by pulling out a gun, and pointing it at the

truck-driver, who immediately retracts his abuse. Despite the violence of the gesture, it

is framed within the show's narrative as victorious, a celebration of cosmopolitan values

over ignorant bigotry. The truck driver, despite having been the one threatened with a

firearm, is cast like Christian Hobbs as the villain of the piece, an enemy of

cosmopolitan values and of individual freedom. Given Michael Jackson's professed

commitment to the provision of culturally-diverse entertainment, it is unsurprising that

such a sequence should have appeared within the series. It is perhaps equally

unsurprising that *Queer as Folk* itself, which so propagated the virtues of

cosmopolitanism, should have been deemed one of the "flagship" shows of C4 in the late

1990s.

It should be mentioned for the sake of balance that Channel 4's depictions of non-hetero

sexuality were not exclusively assimilationist, even under Jackson. Nor did they all

function to offer cosmopolitan heterosexual audiences access into a non-threatening gay subculture. *Queer as Folk* was deemed one of the Corporation's "flagship" dramas in its 1999 annual report.[49] In 2001 however, with rather less fanfare, C4 broadcast *Metrosexuality* (2001), a multi-racial, polysexual comedy-drama written and produced by actor, writer and gay activist Rikki Beadle-Blair. *Metrosexuality* was the antithesis of the gay homogeneity of *Queer as Folk*. As Peter Billingham observes, the gay male world of *Queer as Folk* was both "resolutely white" and "predominantly bourgeois."[50] *Metrosexuality* in contrast featured as its principle protagonist a middle-aged black drag queen and single father, Max (Beadle-Blair), and populated its supporting cast with an array of black and Asian actors. Where *Queer as Folk* defined gay male identity (in a contemporary British context) in terms of consumption-driven individualism, *Metrosexuality* placed emphasis on community and family, albeit configured in a variety of permutations. Max's heterosexual son Kwame (Noel Clarke) lives with his father, but has regular contact with both his father's ex-boyfriend Jordan (Karl Collins), and Jordan's new lover, Jonno (Silas Carson). Kwame's queer best friends Dean (Paul Keating) and Bambi (Davey Fairbanks) are frequently shown in and around Max's warehouse apartment, often without Kwame. Max unwinds after a taxing day with a consolatory tub of ice cream in his sister's kitchen, while her (female) partner looks on; the characters are shown to gather together on a Sunday afternoon for a game of five-a-side football. Gay, lesbian and queer identity and existence are characterised as a matter of friendship and solidarity, brotherhood and sisterhood rather than sex and the acquisition of material items. This community spirit moreover is linked quite explicitly

---

[49] *Channel 4 Television Corporation Report and Financial Statements* 1999, p21. London: Channel 4, 1999.
[50] Peter Billingham, *Sensing the City through Television: Urban Identities in Fiction*, p142. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2000.

within the show with the minority ethnic statuses of Max and the bulk of his extended family. White, middle-class gays and lesbians, the show implied, can sometimes afford to live separately from others like them. Non-white gays, lesbians and queers, conversely, have little choice but to stick together to better protect themselves from abuse in a frequently racist, often homophobic and always heteronormative world. As Max remarks to his sister Cindy (Carleen Beadle) in the opening episode,

> Remember when we first told dad that we were gay? And he said that he still loved us, but he couldn't bear the thought of other people hating us. And you said, too late- we're black.

Much of *Metrosexuality*'s ethos of togetherness and LGBT/queer inclusivity can be attributed directly to the influence of Beadle-Blair. Having developed the show from its origins in 1980s community theatre, Beadle-Blair underscored the themes of family and unity by involving many of his own friends and family in the project. Cindy, for example, is played by his sister, gay doorman Robin (Michael Dotchin) by one of his best friends. A large percentage of the crew he describes as having been "[picked up] along the way through various projects."[51] Unlike *Queer as Folk* creator Russell T. Davies, who refutes the labelling of his programme as "[gay] issues- based" despite conceding that "the simple act of writing about gay men in the twentieth century is a political act," Beadle-Blair is and has been consistently politically aware in his working life.[52] In 2002 he produced *Roots of Homophobia*, a radio documentary investigation into Jamaican

---

[51] Interview with Rikki Beadle-Blair <http://www.pinktink.250x.com/misc/rikkiBB.htm> [20/12/07].
[52] Alan McKee, 'Interview with Russell T. Davies,' p235. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*' 16:2, 2002.

musical culture and homosexuality which won the Sony Radio Academy Awards for Best Radio Feature, while in 2007 he adapted the 1995 film *Stonewall*, based on the 1969 Stonewall riots, for the theatre.[53] Of the Stonewall production, Beadle-Blair recently suggested,

> While you're being entertained, you'll also be informed, but almost by accident. You learn much more through fun and fascination than you do through dictation and duty. Entertainment is a Trojan horse. Once we've enticed you into this world of glitter, we'll sneak out and tell you a few things that you didn't know before [...]You can be deep and shallow at the same time. Just because it's pretty, doesn't mean it's not smart.[54]

The same sentiments might just have easily been expressed about his earlier project. For all its frenetic editing and lingering close-ups of Max's ostentatious wardrobe, and despite the occasionally clumsy performances of its cast, the show spoke at greater volumes about the nature of gay, lesbian and queer politics and community than any terrestrial show released to date- including *Queer as Folk*.

Queer Youth Television: Skins and Sugar Rush

Post-*Queer as Folk*, a significant proportion of Channel 4's gay, lesbian and queer programme content has been delivered via what Glyn Davis terms the "youth television" format. *Sugar Rush* and *Skins*, like Channel 4's young adult comedy-drama *As If* (2001) and the ongoing youth soap *Hollyoaks*, have dealt overtly with sexual minority issues.

---

[53] '*Stonewall*: "We're Still Fighting."' *Independent*, 6th August 2007.
[54] Ibid.

Both have featured gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer and sexually ambiguous characters in central roles. Both have foregrounded frank discussion of gay, lesbian queer sexualities, if not always articulating gay, lesbian and queer sexual behaviour visually. Crucially, both have assimilated LGBT and queer plots and concept into broader narrative threads, integrating homosexuality into their wider thematic frameworks. In doing so, they have worked to blur the distinctions between 'minority,' 'youth' and 'mainstream' television, so helping to fulfil the programming objectives laid out by Michael Jackson, and later Andy Duncan.

First shown at 10.50pm on C4 in 2005, and subsequently on the young adult-oriented E4, *Sugar Rush* documents the sexual and romantic obsession of a fifteen year old Brighton lesbian, Kim (Olivia Hallinan), with her mostly-straight best friend, Sugar (Lenora Crichlow). Adapted from a young adult novel by Julie Burchill and broadcast in two series each comprising ten 30 minute episodes, the programme was billed by C4 as a "riotous exploration of what it means to be young, horny and queer in 21st-century Britain."[55] Stylistically it bore many of the hallmarks of a youth television which David Oswell describes as "ironic, critical and sassy."[56] These included: a cynical voice-over, deployed by Kim to convey her sexual confusion, contempt for her family and increasing desire for Sugar; rapid-fire editing, and an almost-monochrome opening title montage, set to Blondie's spiky 'One Way Or Another' and reminiscent of the title sequence of ITV's not dissimilar *Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged 13 and ¾* (1985). The music employed by the show only augmented its youth television status. The soundtrack

---

[55] 'Sugar Rush' website at Channel4.com
<http://www.channel4.com/life/microsites/S/sugar_rush/show.html> [02/01/08].
[56] David Oswell, 'A Question of Belonging: Television, Youth and the Domestic,' p44. Ed. Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine, *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures*. London: Routledge, 1998.

featured material from then-new bands like Jet, The Black Velvets and The Faders, and covers of older material by contemporary artists (notably the Nouvelle Vague renditions of Depeche Mode's 'Just Can't Get Enough,' The Undertones' 'Teenage Kicks' and The Buzzcocks 'Ever Fallen in Love?'). Subsequently released as a CD collection, this soundtrack was aimed squarely at a younger viewing and listening audience, and specifically one familiar with the bands and singers in question, if not with the less recent songs or their original provenance.

Perhaps understandably for a show featuring such young protagonists at its heart, *Sugar Rush* was concerned, at least in its first series, less with lesbian sex than with mostly-unfulfilled lesbian desire. Emphasis was placed on Kim's *solo* sexual activities, rather than her sexual interactions with other girls, underscoring a more general commentary on the frustrations resulting from thwarted teenage sexuality. The opening scene of the first episode for example shows her fantasising about kissing Sugar while masturbating with an electric toothbrush. Her masturbatory habits, in fact, go on to form one of the recurring jokes of the show. The much-anticipated sex with Sugar, when finally it occurs in the last episode of series one, is implied rather than actually demonstrated. On the run from the police with a stolen credit card, the pair check into a luxury hotel room, take a bath together, flirt and tacitly discuss the likelihood and desirability of sex between them taking place. Sugar rubs Kim's crotch with her foot; Kim responds, "don't, not unless you mean it," Sugar counters by touching her further… and the shot cuts away to a scene ostensibly set the following morning, as the two of them sleep naked and clearly post-coital in the bed. Conversely, if series one was principally about the containment of *unexpressed* queer desire, series two was rather

more about its release. Now seventeen, Kim is highly sexually active, hooking up with both an older woman, Anna (Anna Wilson-Jones), and the woman who becomes her girlfriend, Saint (Sarah-Jane Potts), a sex-shop worker who introduces her to the delights of strap-ons and similar sex toys. By the second series, the frustrations that beset Kim throughout the first series have been supplanted by further sexual dilemmas, specifically the dilemmas that result from her often unsophisticated navigation of her lesbian sexual identity.

Both the lesbian sexual fantasies and adolescent lesbian sex that *Sugar Rush* foregrounded were normalised through direct contrast with the romantic and sexual dysfunctions of the show's heterosexual characters. The myriad failings of Kim's straight family, friends and acquaintances serve to throw her comparatively functional sexual behaviour into sharp relief. Her mother, Stella (Sarah Stewart), is routinely unfaithful to her father, Nathan (Richard Lumsden), and their attempts in the second series to rekindle their ailing sex life result in an ill-advised visit to a swingers' club, ironically supplied by Saint's company. The many men in Sugar's life are shown as violent, exploitative, sexually-aggressive or a combination of the three. Sugar herself displays little to no quality control in her romantic judgements, and is embroiled in sexual misadventure after sexual misadventure throughout the duration of the series. The show's most stabilising influence, in fact, appears in the form of a gay male couple, Kim's neighbours Dave and David (Matthew Vaughan and Daniel Coonan). They are respectable, monogamous and fully assimilated characters, who successfully parent a teenage son and happily dispense advice on property maintenance to Nathan and Stella, who characteristically begins an affair with the handyman they recommend.

Heterosexuality in *Sugar Rush* is far from a gold standard to which non-heterosexual characters within the programme's narrative should aspire, but seems instead to bring many problems of its own.

Like *Sugar Rush*, *Skins* rejected the grand narrative of heteronormativity. Broadcast first on E4 and then C4 and into its third series as of 2009, it focuses on a mixed-gender group of sixteen to eighteen year old A Level students in Bristol, and has featured gay, lesbian and sexually-ambiguous characters in major roles throughout its run.[57] Several of its lead characters have exhibited markedly queer behaviour. In the early series, Maxxi (Mitch Hewer), a self-identified young gay man is out to friends and classmates throughout the college, and Tony (Nicholas Hoult), a narcissistic, controlling and stereotypically sociopathic 'bad bisexual' "fucks everyone… including boys," as his girlfriend notes. Both are shown to be attractive, sexually active teens, and both are assimilated seamlessly and unproblematically into the show's universe. The series one episode, 'From Russia with Love' in fact has the two engaged (briefly and abortively) in a sexual encounter, albeit one that shoots them (presumably on account of the young age of the actors involved) from behind, and from the waist up. His girlfriend passed out on the bed beside them, Tony offers Maxxi oral sex; the boys strip, and Tony falls to his knees, before Maxxi stops and pulls away, informing him, "you've finally found something you're not actually good at." Indicating the indifference with which almost all of the show's major characters regard sexual diversity, Maxxi's regret immediately after the incident derives not from Tony's gender, but from his own imagined promiscuity

---

[57] Series 3 of Skins replaced the original characters discussed with an entirely new cast of A Level students. These included several notable lesbian, gay and bisexual characters, and series 3 in fact foregrounded a burgeoning relationship between two young female characters. This discussion however focuses exclusively on the first and second series of the show.

and ethical transgression. He worries, not that people will care that he sleeps with other boys, but that he will be perceived as "a slut," and judged accordingly. Potentially hurtful sexual behaviour, not benign sexual identity, is the matter likely to incur judgement. Character judgement, within the show's narrative, is elicited on the basis of communally-decreed teenage ethics, rather than Judeo-Christian morals.

It follows that Maxxie's homosexuality is rarely negatively evaluated by any of the lead characters, and indeed is rarely commented upon in the early parts of the show, except in the context of a "big gay night" out he organises with his straight friends in the first episode of series one. Only in the episode 'From Russia with Love' does his sexuality manifest as an issue to be addressed, and only then when it conflicts with the religious beliefs of a Muslim character, Anwar (Dev Patel). Anwar, in fact, is positioned throughout the episode as the outsider, an enemy of cosmopolitanism in his inability to accept Maxxie's homosexuality. Hurt and saddened by his friend's attitude, Maxxie seeks solace in the company of Tony and mutual friend Sid (Mike Bailey), while Anwar is forced to deal with his homophobia alone. Later, filled with righteous anger, Maxxie verbally attacks a cowed Anwar for the conflict vis-à-vis non-hetero sexuality that derives from his faith. Anwar's homophobia, rather than Maxxie's homosexuality is the narrative problem which must be resolved- as it is when, in the last episode of series one, he embraces his friend's gay identity, and the pair reconcile.

It should perhaps also be noted that the explicit lesbian and gay youth sexuality of *Skins*, and of *Sugar Rush*, was indebted in no small way to legislative alterations which occured in the early 2000s. By 2004, when *Sugar Rush* was first broadcast, Section 28

had been removed from the Local Government Act, enabling discussion of homosexuality in British classrooms. The age of consent for sex between men had also been lowered, to sixteen. In no small measure, these alterations allowed for the commissioning of shows like *Skins* and *Sugar Rush*, which presented their audiences with young, sexually active gay, lesbian and bisexual characters unimpeded by homophobic challenges within the education system, and indeed the wider world. *Sugar Rush*'s Kim faces none of the classroom isolation and intimidation experienced by *Queer as Folk*'s Nathan. The second series of *Sugar Rush*, in fact, shows at least one other young lesbian in her class at college. Likewise *Skins* shows its gay characters openly discussing their sexuality in the classroom without reprisal. When in episode seven, for example, Maxxi performs a penitent confession about his involvement with Tony during the course of a psychology class, he is greeted with bemused and awkward silence of the kind which might greet a similar confession by a heterosexual character, rather than hostility or abuse. Indeed his encounter with Tony might not have made it on television at all, had the age of consent remained at eighteen, much less might it have featured in a programme aimed specifically at a younger audience. Both shows, and others like them, have reaped the benefits of the Blair government's policy on youth sexuality and gay and lesbian assimilation.

The LGBT-friendly programme content of *Skins* and *Sugar Rush* was supplemented by some aggressive multi-platform marketing on the part of Channel 4. Both shows can be regarded as examples of what John Caldwell terms "convergence television," in that they have been broadcast not only on the terrestrial and digital television channels, but

"across the borders of both new technologies and media forms," and specifically on the internet.[58] Caldwell suggests that,

> The most effective websites for TV succeed by keeping viewer-users engaged long after a series episode has aired, and this requires greatly expanding the notion of what a TV text is. Shows accomplish this through at least six online strategies: "characterised" proliferations of the text; "narrativised" elaborations of the text; "backstory" textuality; "metacritical" textuality; technological augmentations; and merchandising augmentations.[59]

Skins' web presence adopts all six of these strategies, and more, to varying degrees. The *Skins* website, a microsite of Channel4.com, features competitions, mp3 downloads and a link to a mailing list that delivers "free stuff" to its subscribers every week. Episode guides, trailers and interviews with the cast are also available. So too are links to the show's profile on the social networking site MySpace, and to a customised forum that allows fans to discuss characters and the events of previous episodes and speculate about what might happen later in the series. Myspace-style profiles for each of the major characters, written from a first person perspective, were featured as of 2008 under the site's "Us" section, and offered the dedicated viewer an opportunity to learn more about them. Tony, for example, described 'himself' as "16th, going on 17th century" in outlook, identified his favourite food as potatoes, favourite film stars as Humphrey Bogart, Jack Lemmon and Steve McQueen, and the "coolest thing [he's] ever done" as "naked

---

[58] John Caldwell, 'Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration,' p50. Eds. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
[59] Ibid, p51.

sledging." Past episodes are available for live streaming via 4's On Demand service, while ten-minute "unseen" episodes, never shown on television, can also be watched online, and serve to flesh out and augment the plots of the regular episodes broadcast. In 2008, another short episode, titled '*Skins* Secret Party Special,' was broadcast via the show's MySpace page, and a Christmas-themed special aired on the official programme website. Such emphasis on convergence strategies inevitably signals C4's acknowledgement of what Caldwell calls "television's current and final transfer to digital technology and digital content."[60] Similarly, the Channel 4 Corporation's use of multimedia platforms underscores its commitment to meeting the viewing requirements of its technology-savvy key demographics, cosmopolitan "16- 34 year olds and [middle class] ABC1s."[61] The sheer volume of extra-textual material surrounding *Skins* the programme also suggests a desire on C4's part to transplant the show out of the minority-viewing arena and into the mainstream, so normalising and embracing its gay, lesbian and queer content as just another facet of contemporary youth culture.

Sugar Rush also boasted a significant online presence. This presence similarly normalised non-heterosexual young adult sexuality and, sought to tie-in the show's extratextual promotional material with safer-sex information aimed specifically at girls and women in their teens and early twenties. The Channel 4 website for the series provided not only the series guides and faux-biographic information common to television-drama promotional sites, but also lesbian safer sex information and queer-positive advice on teenage sexual experimentation. Like the promotional discourses

---

[60] Ibid, p47.
[61] *Channel 4 Statement of Programme Promises* 2007, p1. London: Channel 4, 2007.

surrounding *Skins*, the ancillary content surrounding *Sugar Rush* strategically positioned (young) lesbian and gay sexuality as a marketing category, an exclusive subculture to which television and web audiences were promised contingent access.

When compared with the web presence of other shows first broadcast on Channel 4 and its subsidiary digital channels, for example that of *Skins*, the *Sugar Rush* site provided only meagre entertainments and the bare minimum of programme-related information. Unlike the *Skins* site however the *Sugar Rush* site provided a series of weblinks to other Channel 4 microsites, prominently displayed along the right-hand side of the site's homepage. These links dispensed information, support and problem page-style advice on gay and lesbian sexual health, adolescent sexual confusion and the negotiation of sexual identity. The presence of these links revealed a great deal about the Channel 4 Corporation's conceptions, not simply of *Sugar Rush* as a show whose gay and lesbian themes might be exploited for the purposes of multimedia marketing, but of its own role as a broadcaster in a cultural climate wherein both a multiplicity of media platforms and a proliferation of sexual identities are equally commonplace.

Like the programme content of *Queer as Folk*, the online promotional strategies surrounding *Sugar Rush* provided their own definition of a socially acceptable kind of non-heterosexuality. *Sugar Rush*'s website describes the show as "a riotous exploration of what it means to be young, horny and queer in 21st-century Britain." In the *Sugar Rush* universe, to be "queer" is to be utterly assimilated, to be undifferentiated from mainstream (hetero) sexuality. To be "young, horny and queer" is more or less to be young, horny and straight with only a mild variation in sexual taste distinguishing one

from the other. "Young" and "horny" are the keywords of the description, and of the programme's ethos. The word "queer" is in itself virtually redundant, and certainly is devoid of any political connotation in this context. In this regard, the show and its web engage with wider discourses existing around the ongoing cultural mainstreaming of non-heterosexuality in the UK, as well as providing insight into Channel 4's position on matters of sexuality as they pertain to its (young) target audience.

One of the pages to which the main *Sugar Rush* site links, a 4Health guide to coming out as gay or lesbian, assures its audience that "being straight is [not] 'normal'... it's just very common. So don't worry. Being a gay man or a lesbian [...] or bisexual isn't good or bad, right or wrong. It just is."[62] Ideologically, this statement occupies similar ground to *Sugar Rush* the show. The attitudinal connection between programme and advice is apparent upon reading, as is the logic of providing a link to one site in the main body of the other. Channel 4's advice contributes to its rhetorical self-assessment as a gay-positive broadcaster, further characterising the Channel 4 Corporation and its subsidiaries as supportive of the social inclusion of non-heterosexuals. Another link, to another 4health microsite billed as a 'Sexuality Q&A' advises a sexually-confused 18 year old take her time in deciding on a sexual identity, because "whatever you decide is okay."[63] Again, Channel 4's advocacy of sexual exploration and endorsement of non-heterosexuality as a legitimate life-choice sits easily enough with its public service broadcasting remit and its history. If any UK terrestrial broadcaster is likely to promote sexual diversity, it is this one. The same link, though, goes further even than one might

---

[62] 4Health: 'Coming Out' at Channel4.com <http://www.channel4.com/health/microsites/0-9/4health/sex/lgb_comingout.html> [18/05/08]
[63] 'Sexuality Q&A' at Channel4.com <http://www.channel4.com/health/microsites/A/adultat14/sexuality/sexuality_qa.shtml> [ibid]

expect of Channel 4. In response to 'Charlie,' an out lesbian teenager interested in practising safer sex, the site observes that "lesbians tend to be forgotten" in matters of sexual health, and then moves towards redressing that imbalance with information about dental dams, the sharing of sex toys and the desirability of flavoured lubricant. Given the paucity of information available in the mainstream media about safer sex between women, this level of candour on the once-taboo topic represents a step forward in educating young audiences on sexual health issues.

This sexual candour however reflects not only Channel 4's public service obligations, but the commodification of young lesbian sexuality within *Sugar Rush* the show. Just as gay male sexuality was in *Queer as Folk*, young lesbian sexuality in Sugar Rush is reduced to a series of consumer choices. Kim's entrance into the gay and lesbian world is marked, like Nathan's in *Queer as Folk*, by her patronage of a gay venue, the lesbian Clit Club. Unlike *Queer as Folk*'s men however she is seen to rely on her consumer choices as a means of achieving not only sexual desirability, but sexual satisfaction. Though content initially to masturbate with an electric toothbrush, she graduates over the course of the series to a dildo, a vibrator, and then, upon her involvement with sex toy enthusiast Saint, to a strap-on, courtesy of Saint's dyke sex emporium Munch Box. The expression of her sexual identity becomes steadily more contingent upon her financial outlay, to the extent that orgasm itself is rendered a consumerist practice within the programme's narrative. Defined like the main characters of *Queer as Folk* by her materialistic impulses, Kim presented Channel 4's audiences with a similarly unthreatening kind of lesbian visibility. Like these audiences, whom the Corporation identify as in thrall to

expensive goods and "costly technologies," she is fully immersed in a consumer culture that ultimately validates her (sexual) identity.

Lizzie Thynne's insinutation that "the politics of feminism" are incompatible with the cultural logic of consumerism would seem to cast doubt over any reading of *Sugar Rush* as a contemporary consumerist text. The lesbian sex that *Sugar Rush* offers its audience however is not coded as specifically feminist. In fact, the show took pains to distance itself from the sexual politics of feminism, with Kim in particular characterised not as a feminist, but as a modern, sexually liberated proto-woman with certain postfeminist attributes, whose very sexual empowerment derives in part from her engagement with consumerism, and specifically consumer technology. As she puts it in an early episode, "it's the 21st Century. A 15- year-old using a toothbrush to masturbate over her best friend shouldn't be that big a deal."

However, while Kim demonstrates some of the postfeminist qualities possessed by for example the four leads of *Sex and the City*, notably her relatively guilt-free enjoyment of sexual pleasure, the character's construction more closely correlates with a related phenomenon, "Girl Power." Popularised by English pop group the Spice Girls in 1997, the term "Girl Power" was subsequently entered into the *OED* as "a self-reliant attitude among girls and young women manifested in ambition, assertiveness, and individualism." This is a far cry from the predisposition to collective action exhibited by in particular the third-wave feminists of the 1990s. Jessica Taft identifies Girl Power as "safe" and essentially apolitical in makeup, in that it poses no threat to consumer capitalism. One of the four meanings of the term as it is understood in contemporary

culture, she claims, is "Girl Power as consumer power," Girl Power as a "softer, sexier"

alternative to feminism that emphasises "beauty and appearance."[64] In this respect Girl

Power functions to better sell specific kinds of products, for example the clothes,

cosmetics and any other accessory that might augment an individual girl's appearance,

and so better "empower" her.[65] Kim, Saint and the various other young lesbians

populating the *Sugar Rush* landscape are all empowered similarly. All wear cosmetics

and suitably fashionable clothes; all sport enviably coiffed hair. Tellingly, all tend

towards the feminine end of the aesthetic spectrum. This represents a radical re-

imagining of south coast lesbian subculture given that, as Sally Munt among others has

noted, the 'real' Brighton plays host in equal parts to the butch, the femme and the

androgynous.[66] In this respect, *Sugar Rush* had much in common with gay male-

oriented shows like *Queer as Folk*, ideologically if not in the specific kind of non-

heterosexuality on which it focuses. As its web presence suggests, the show sought

primarily to establish for Channel 4 a core audience among "young, horny and queer"

and, crucially, *consuming* girls and women.

Conclusion: From Minority to Mainstream

As the above case studies demonstrate, the years between 1997 and 2007 have seen a

marked increase in the volume of gay, lesbian and queer representations on C4 and its

subsidiaries. From the explosion in visibly gay, lesbian and queer images in its

---

[64] Jessica K. Taft, 'Girl Power Politics: Pop-Culture Barriers and Organisational Resistance,' p69-71. Ed. Anita Harris, *All about the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity.* London: Routledge, 2004.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Sally R. Munt, *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space.* New York: New York University Press, 1998.

programming under Michael Jackson, to the Andy Duncan-era elision of on-screen sexual difference within its mainstream shows, Channel 4 has documented more than any other terrestrial broadcaster recent changes in attitudes to sexuality and sexual orientation within British society. Its public service broadcasting remit has of course necessitated that it meet the viewing needs of sexual minorities. Moreover as discussed above, post-2003 alterations in the nature of this remit have allowed the Corporation to reconfigure its conception of 'minority,' and so to more smoothly assimilate non-heterosexual representations into is schedules.

In this respect, Channel 4, its changing brand identity and its shifting programming policies regarding LGBT and queer representation serve as useful barometers for the British cultural negotiation of homosexuality. In the 1980s and early 1990s, during the Thatcher/Major years, LGBT and queer-themed television unequivocally constituted 'minority interest' programming, if only because Conservative government policy and rhetoric of the time sought to cast non-heterosexual Britons as 'minority' individuals existing outside of the cultural mainstream. However, from the election of the Blair government onwards, government policy and subsequently print media focus has shifted away from the marginalisation of gays and lesbians, and towards their social and economic integration. Channel 4's policy and programming since 1997 has reflected this focus on integration.

This can doubtless be attributed in part to market forces, and specifically the need to attract advertising revenue to C4 and its related digital terrestrial channels. As Chapter 5 notes in the context of ITV and Five, British commercial broadcasters must attract

sponsors to its programming in sufficient numbers in order to survive. Since the terms of the 1990 Broadcasting Act rendered it a self-funding corporate entity, Channel 4 has been reliant on its advertisers to generate funds. The target audiences of C4 and E4 are among those most attractive to advertisers, since these are among the most likely to have access to disposable income and, as the Corporation itself has observed, to spend this income freely on non-essential goods and services. Younger viewers and cosmopolitan ABCs are among those most likely to want cultural diversity represented in television programming. It is therefore logical, as this chapter has suggested, for Channel 4 to offer these target audiences the cosmopolitan and culturally-diverse programming they desire.

Channel 4's transition from a single minority-oriented channel to a multi-channel broadcaster providing mainstream, cosmopolitan programming served a pragmatic end. It must appeal to specific groups of viewers, and it must demonstrate its popularity, so as to placate its sponsors and draw in revenue. A channel that fails to reflect societal changes, as Michael Jackson has suggested, risks falling into obsolescence. The societal changes within Britain since C4's launch in 1982 have been enormous, particularly regarding attitudes to homosexuality. Assimilationist representations of gay and lesbian identity have predominated on the Channel 4 Corporation's channels since the mid 1990s, but equally, gays and lesbians *have been* to some extent assimilated into the fabric of mainstream British society. The commodified, consumerist representations of homosexuality and lesbianism provided by Channel 4, and the concomitant exclusion of more radical kinds of queerness, have explicitly reiterated the Blair government's policy line on the social integration of gays and lesbians. However, they have also reflected the

tastes and interests of both cosmopolitan heterosexuals and socially integrated gays and lesbians, catering to the viewing appetites of "good homosexuals," if not of "dangerous queers."

Chapter 4. Queer TV on the BBC: Branding, Genre and the "Good Homosexual"

In a 1998 essay on public service broadcasting and digital media in the UK, Jeanette Steemers observes that,

> There is no such thing as a 'pure' public service broadcaster. Within the current mixed system of private and public broadcasting, public broadcasters are required to compete for viewers with mass appeal programming at peak times to maintain audience levels and justify licence fee funding.[1]

All television channel operators must successfully attract viewers in significant numbers if they are to survive in what is an increasingly competitive broadcasting environment. "Yet," she adds, "the essential difference" between publicly-funded and commercial broadcasters is that,

> public broadcasters pursue and seek to fulfil societal objectives that are noticeably different from the profit-oriented objectives of commercial television companies, whose pursuit of profit has a tendency to reduce the diversity, range and accessibility of television to appeal to the common denominator.[2]

---

[1] Jeanette Steemers, 'On the Threshold of the 'Digital Age': Prospects for Public Service Broadcasting,' p108. Ed. Jeanette Steemers, *Changing Channels: Prospects for Television in a Digital World.* Luton: University of Luton Press, 1998.
[2] Ibid.

For British terrestrial audiences, the BBC is the closest thing to a "pure" public service broadcaster available. While ITV and Channels 4 and 5 also operate according to specialised public service remits,[3] only the BBC derives the bulk of its revenue from licence fee payments, which at the time of writing remain mandatory for all UK residents whose television sets receive signal.[4] This means that in order to justify and secure its continued existence, the BBC must promote itself through its programming and overall brand identity as what Brian McNair terms "a well-resourced market leader," one that "defines the economic and aesthetic parameters within which the commercial public service broadcasters [...] operate, and the standards they must reach to achieve 'quality.'"[5] It also means that the public service remit under which it operates is necessarily rigorous. This remit dictates that the BBC caters in its schedules to a wide range of audience interests and cultural tastes, that it adequately reflects the cultural diversity of Britain in its programming, and that it addresses all social and political issues raised in its broadcast content with balance, fairness and impartiality. The requirement that the BBC make at least some attempt to adequately represent Britain as a nation, and to inculcate a unifying sense of national identity in its audiences has long been implicit in this remit. Glen Creeber suggests that it has been "responsible for producing a form of cultural hegemony that has helped to dictate and form British public opinion and social attitudes for nearly a century," and has "played a crucial role in conceiving and cementing notions of 'Britishness'" through its efforts to construct "a

---

[3] The specific requirements of each channels' individual public service remit are discussed in detail in this and other chapters.

[4] The annual fee is fixed at the time of writing at £139.50 for a colour television licence, and £47 for a black and white set.

[5] Brian McNair, 'Which Publics, What Services?: British Public Service Broadcasting Beyond 2006,' p103. Eds. Gregory Ferrell Lowe and Per Jauert, *Cultural Dilemmas in Public Service Broadcasting*. Göteborg, Sweden: Nordicom, 2005.

deep sense of national consciousness and consensus."[6] As I hope to suggest, this will to

unify public opinion has had considerable consequences for gay, lesbian and queer

visibility on BBC channels, and has led the BBC Corporation in the 1997-2007 period to

favour the representation of one particular, assimilationist model of gay and lesbian

(but not queer) identity over others.

A great deal of attention has been paid by the BBC to the needs and requirements of

minority audiences, including gay and lesbian audiences, during the New Labour years.

However, while this attention has resulted in an overall increase in gay and lesbian

themed television, it has done little to increase the variety of non-heterosexual

representation on offer. As this chapter's case studies demonstrate, the BBC has in the

last decade favoured respectable, socially-integrated and apolitical models of gay (rather

than queer) identity above any other in its programming, often by depicting alternative

representations of unassimilated, politicised, disruptive queerness in an unflattering,

undesirable light. It has also tended to overlook what Rosemary Hennessy terms "the

material realities" of contemporary and historical queer existence, in the interests of

promoting a gay-assimilationist agenda.[7]

The term "assimilation" in this context refers here, as elsewhere in this project, to the

integration of gays and lesbians into the British cultural mainstream. In political terms,

as discussed in Chapter 2, it pertains to certain policy measures implemented by Tony

Blair's Labour government which awarded new legal rights, protections and

---

[6] Glen Creeber, '"Hideously White": British Television, Glocalisation and National Identity,' pp28-9. *Television & New Media* 5:1, 2004.

[7] Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, p6. London: Routledge, 2000.

recognitions to gay and lesbian Britons with a view to facilitating their greater economic and social contributions to British society. In broadcasting terms, it relates to both the integration of gay and lesbian content into mainstream (specifically terrestrial) television schedules, and to the proliferation of specific types of gay and lesbian visibility within these schedules.

The Corporation's tendency towards assimilationist representations of non-hetero sexualities can be read as a continuation of a broadcasting policy that has long attempted to create national and cultural unity through programming decisions, homogenising 'alternative' cultural identities in the interests of maintaining this unity. Georgina Born notes that under the leadership of Greg Dyke, Director-General between 2000 and 2004, the BBC Corporation made efforts to "pluralise and modernise its audience address" through the production of programmes with a greater focus on minority ethnic cultures and characters. This resulted in the green-lighting of shows like *Babyfather* (2001-02) and *The Kumars at No. 42* (2001-06).[8] Born concludes, though, that these efforts sat uneasily with "the sanctimonious nationalism that has always been a formative part of its makeup," and that the Corporation remains overall insensitive to the needs and desires of the diverse cultures that exist within the UK.[9] Though John Ellis among others remains optimistic about public service television's potential to provide space for the representation and negotiation of multiple viewpoints and cultural identities and the working-through of cultural differences, the BBC's broadcast

---

[8] Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*, p510. London: Secker and Warburg, 2004. As Born observes, Dyke also took steps to address what he described as the "hideous whiteness" of the BBC's production and managerial cultures, raising targets for the employment of minority ethnic workers "from 8 to 10 per cent, and for management from 2 to 4 per cent" (ibid, p470).
[9] Ibid, p510.

output in the years between 1997 and 2007 only confirm Creeber's claim that it consciously sidelines "dissident or minority voices."[10] Its gay and lesbian programme content in particular does little to reflect the diversity of Britain's sexual minority communities.

Perhaps more so than other broadcasters, the BBC constitutes a significant part of the British cultural mainstream. Symbolically, it ostensibly belongs to the British public in a way in which, for example, Channel 4 and ITV do not. It generates programme content intended to appeal to the biggest possible audience, and is obliged to satisfy the needs of the broadest possible group of citizen-consumers. It is the only British broadcaster to operate under a Royal Charter. Renewed even ten years at the government's discretion following a parliamentary performance review, the Charter specifies what Georgina Born calls "the objectives, functions and financial operations" of the Corporation, and most fully enshrines its "constitutional status" as a state owned organisation.[11] It outlines the role which the Corporation plays in the dissemination of entertainment and information, and the manner in which it must work in "the public interest."[12]

Since its inception in the 1920s, the primary goal of the BBC has been "to inform, educate and entertain" UK audiences.[13] This phrase appears in the Corporation's current

---

[10] John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the age of uncertainty.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2000
[11] Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision,* p31.
[12] BBC Royal Charter 2006. London: HMSO.
[13] Michael Tracey, *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting*, p100. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Royal Charter, and is identified therein as its chief "Public Purpose," its "mission."[14]

Currently, the Charter defines its "Public Purposes" as,

Sustaining citizenship and civil society;

Promoting education and learning;

Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence;

Representing the UK, its regions, nations and communities;

Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK.

[And] in promoting its other purposes, helping to deliver to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services and, in addition, taking a leading role in the switchover to digital television.[15]

The 1996 Charter, which regulated the Corporation's activities during the first nine years of the Blair government, ostensibly placed less emphasis on the Corporation's responsibility to "represent" diversity and "sustain citizenship." It specified instead that the BBC was to approach "controversial subjects with due accuracy and impartiality," that it was to abide by the existing terms of the 1990 Broadcasting Act regarding broadcasting standards and public service obligations, and that it was to endeavour to

---

[14] BBC Royal Charter 2006.
[15] Ibid.

"reflect the needs and interests of the public" in its programming.[16] Even without explicit legislative imperatives, though, the BBC was conscious of the need to offer appropriate representation to diverse social and cultural groups in the years between 1996 and 2006. This was not only to fulfil its overarching public service obligations, but also as a means of continuing to appeal to UK viewers. The Corporation's 2001/2002 Annual Report illustrates this well. The Report stressed the BBC's desire to "serve and [be] valued by currently under-served audiences."[17] It also noted that "the BBC must be brave in reflecting society's changes,"[18] and reiterated,

> as a public service broadcaster, we have specific obligations to meet the needs of minorities and special interest groups […] if the BBC fails to reflect in its programming the multiculturalism that the young in particular now take for granted, there is a real danger of becoming irrelevant to major parts of our audience.[19]

For the BBC as for Channel 4 (and indeed ITV), the key word here is "relevance." Popularity and appeal to large, diverse audiences are the only means by which the BBC justifies its existence as a licence fee funded institution. Viewing figures demonstrate its relevance and popularity and, regardless of the marketing strategies it deploys as a means of cultivating target audiences for specific shows or channels, the BBC is primarily a ratings-driven business, albeit one that functions within the parameters of public service obligations. This should serve as a caveat for the following discussion. Even when the BBC itself designates a programme or a channel "non-mainstream," it

---

[16] BBC Royal Charter 1996. London: HMSO.
[17] BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2001/2002, p13. London: BBC.
[18] Ibid, p44.
[19] Ibid, p53.

generally signifies an expectation that the programme or channel in question will attract fewer viewers than other channels or programmes also provided by the BBC Corporation, rather than recognition that the programme or channel possesses qualities that position it in opposition to mainstream norms or values.

What scope there is for the presentation of cultural diversity on the BBC has been forged in part by the onset of digitisation, and the Corporation's subsequent formation of (at the time of writing) seven new free-to-air digital terrestrial channels. Alongside BBC1 and BBC2 are now BBC3, BBC4, BBC HD, BBC News, BBC Parliament, CBBC (designed for young viewers) and CBeebies (for children under 6), as well as the Wales-only BBC 2W. Each new channel was launched with its own brand identity, just as BBC2 began in 1964 as an arts and education-themed alternative to the more mainstream and established BBC1. Each promised to deliver something somewhat different from the existing BBC content, whether by devoting more airtime to specific programme genres (comedy, documentary, current affairs) or by expanding into more experimental programming territory. However, as the following case studies suggest, each channel has gone only so far in delivering innovation, creativity or a space for the representation of groups outside of the cultural mainstream. Each has so far deferred to precedents set by the major BBC channels, BBC1 and BBC2, in its presentation of non-heterosexual content. As on the established BBC channels, assimilationist modes of lesbian and gay identity have been and continue to be favoured above all others. For the purposes of concision, the paragraphs that follow focus primarily on BBC3 and BBC4, the only two channels (with the exception of the high definition-only BBC HD) to focus exclusively on adult-oriented entertainment programming, and so the only two to have generated gay

and lesbian programme content to any significant extent. As discussed in previous chapters, the term "mainstream" in this context refers to the collection of values, groups and identities deemed as such by government and cultural policy and policy-makers of the 1990s and 2000s. It excludes groups whose values, ideas and identities remain unincorporated into the designated mainstream by such policy and policy-makers. "Cultural mainstream" here encompasses the collective cultural artefacts produced by and for these groups, including its television broadcasting.

BBC3 has actively courted mainstream success, and has in the last few years generated several very popular gay, lesbian and (occasionally) queer themed shows, including *Little Britain* and *Torchwood*. The channel was established in early 2003 as a replacement for BBC Choice, a digital entertainment channel that offered children's and adult's programming to complement that broadcast by BBC1 and BBC2, as well as housing repeats of shows first broadcast on the non-digital BBC channels. Like the digital Channel 4 subsidiary E4, BBC3 is aimed primarily at young adult audiences, specifically those within the 25 to 34 age bracket.[20] Like BBC4, it is unavailable to analogue viewers, and at the time of writing broadcasts only in the evenings. The BBC press office describes the channel as offering "a mixed schedule of quality British programmes" that "reflects [the] complex lives, concerns and interests" of its key demographic.[21] In content terms, this ethos has manifested in a slew of comedy and drama shows with absurdist, gently irreverent but rarely overtly counter-cultural edges, shows like *The Mighty Boosh* (2004-), *Nighty Night* (2004-05), *Two Pints of Lager and*

---

[20] 'Key Facts' at BBC.co.uk<http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/keyfacts/stories/bbcthree.shtml>
[04/07/08]
[21] Ibid.

a Packet of Crisps (2001-09, originally broadcast on BBC1) and *Gavin and Stacey* (2007-). Its gay, lesbian and queer material has followed a similar pattern. As well as *Little Britain* and *Torchwood*, BBC3 has broadcast shows like *Sinchronicity* (2006), a six-part drama in the vein of the BBC's earlier *This Life* that explored the complicated romantic and professional lives of a group of sexually-diverse twentysomethings in contemporary Manchester. These have exemplified the channel's propensity for delivering programming which, as the former BBC3 Controller Julian Bellamy puts it, "chimes with the core values of the channel [in being] young, interesting and entertaining."[22]

Launched in 2002 as a successor to the abortive BBC Knowledge channel, BBC4 conversely has founded its early reputation on providing arts, cultural and current affairs programming similar to that offered by BBC2. It is currently described by the BBC website as "an intelligent alternative to programme's on the mainstream TV channels."[23] The BBC's 2002/3 Annual Report reveals that BBC4 was "never envisaged as a mainstream channel" itself, a claim substantiated by its commitment to individual shows and scheduling decisions arguably too highbrow for mainstream terrestrial television.[24] These have included, among others, an adaptation of *The Alan Clark Diaries* (2003), the *Storyville* documentary series, film footage of several productions by the Royal Ballet, and a live remake of the 1953 *Quatermass Experiment* (2005). The channel's most sizeable contribution to non-heterosexual visibility since its launch has

---

[22] 'BBC Three Commissions Sinchronicity, a Manchester-Based Drama' at BBC.co.uk
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2006/04_april/18/sinchronicity.shtml>
[07/07/08]
[23] 'BBC4: Frequently Asked Questions' at BBC.co.uk <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/faq.shtml>
[04/07/08]
[24] BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2002/2003, p26. London: BBC.

been the *Hidden Lives* series, a week-long season of programming shown in September 2007 to mark the 50th anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK. Typically for a BBC4 season, *Hidden Lives* mixed broadcasts of documentary (*It's Not Unusual*, 1997; *Andrew and Jeremy Get Married*, 2004, and others), made-for-television film (*Breaking the Code*, 1996) and new drama (*Consenting Adults*, 2007) in such a way as to appear designed to appeal to a minority of viewers, rather than to mainstream audiences.

Neither BBC3 nor BBC4 are autonomous entities, however. The scheduling and production teams behind both function within the larger corporate body of the BBC, and are accountable to its managerial and executive branches, in particular to the Director-General.[25] Movement of individual programmes between channels, and the 'upgrading' of popular programmes from BBC3 and BBC4 to BBC1 and BBC2 are common occurrences, common enough that individual digital channel brand identity cannot be regarded as determining BBC programme content to any significant extent.[26] By far the greatest determinant of the mode and delivery of gay and lesbian content on BBC channels is the BBC Corporation's overall brand identity. For this reason, the three case studies that follow do not focus on three individual gay, lesbian and queer themed programmes. Instead, they look at three genres of entertainment programme that have proved consistently popular when broadcast by the BBC, and that have helped to consolidate its reputation as a provider of quality television with mass appeal. The case studies examine the appearance of gay, lesbian and queer material within these genres

---

[25] As Georgina Born among others has observed, the Corporation's upper management has since Greg Dyke's tenure as Director-General placed increased emphasis on the creative and financial accountability of individual BBC units to its executive body.
[26] I return to this point later in the chapter.

on BBC channels since 1997, and the changing nature of the BBC's relationship with these genres as they evolve. In doing so, they aim to corroborate Glen Creeber's assertion that the BBC has failed in its duty to adequately represent the cultural diversity of contemporary Britain. They aim also to demonstrate that, though the volume of gay, lesbian and queer material on its channels has increased, the mode of representation favoured remains dispiritingly uniform.

Examination of the genres within which gay, lesbian and occasionally queer content has appeared on the BBC also affords an insight into the different ways in which BBC programming presents and negotiates issues of sexual difference, while adhering to a broader gay-assimilationist mode of representation. Broadly, this constitutes insight into how and why specific nuances of gay, lesbian and queer visibility differ, even as their overall significance remains the same.

A solid definition of the term "genre" is notoriously difficult to provide. However, Nick Lacey's assertion that changes within the "repertoire of elements" (narrative, characters, setting and so on) that make up a given television programme function as signifiers of its generic placement works well for the purposes of this project.[27] So the term "costume drama" applies in this chapter to productions set in the past, which may have fairly serious narrative concerns and a strong emphasis on evoking the look of a certain historical place and period through visual elements like make-up, costume and staging. "Sci-fi" connotes programming that engages with futuristic, extraterrestrial, scientific

---

[27] Nick Lacey, *Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies*, p133. Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan, 2000.

and/or technological themes, that might employ alien or robotic-themed make-up and special effects, and that might be itself be set in the future. "Comedy" suggests programming designed to elicit laughter from its audience, and is defined more than the preceding two genres by its intended effect than by specific narrative or staging elements. Television situation comedy in particular may often be distinguished from other genres by the presence of a canned laughter track. Jason Mittell's identification of "advertising, promotions, parodies and intertextual references" and extratextual elements like scheduling as "vital sites of generic practice" is also relevant here.[28] As the case studies demonstrate, all of these elements are utilised by broadcasters to situate programmes generically, and to nurture specific sets of expectations in their audiences. Furthermore, the BBC provides itself industrial pointers that give some indication of the genre into which its individual programmes might best fit, dividing its production budget between departments designated 'Drama,' 'Comedy' and so on.

Genres build and then play to or subvert certain expectations of programme content in its audiences. This applies as much to the appearance of gay, lesbian and queer content as to any other. Steve Neale notes that film genres "participate constantly in an ongoing process of construction of sexual difference and sexual identity."[29] On the BBC, different genres of programme present different kinds of gay, lesbian and queer content, and are designed and marketed to appeal to different kinds of audiences. Neale adds that the film industry frequently makes efforts to heighten the popularity of its genre products by inscribing them with "'points of identification'" intended to appeal to both male and

---

[28] Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*, p15. London: Routledge, 2004.
[29] Stephen Neale, *Genre*, p56. London: BFI, 1980.

female viewers.[30] In the case of BBC programming, the argument can be extended to sexuality as well as gender. As heterosexual "cosmopolitans" increasingly engage in the consumption of gay-themed goods and services, a commercial imperative is placed on service providers like the BBC to embed "points of identification" for heterosexual audiences in the queer themed material they produce. More "points of identification" equate to more viewers, although they may also equate to a dilution of the very thematic elements that allow programmes to be deemed gay, lesbian or queer in the first place. When examining the different kinds of gay, lesbian and queer visibility offered by the BBC, the following case studies also consider how each programme and genre functions to appeal to heterosexual as well as gay, lesbian and queer audiences. Similarly, they consider the effect of this imagined appeal on the programme's, the genre's and the BBC's overall construction of non-hetero sexualities.

The *Tipping the Velvet* Effect: prestige, appropriation and period drama

In pursuit of quality popular drama, the BBC has lavished a great deal of money and scheduling time since the 1960s on three interrelated sub-genres of programming: the costume drama, the literary adaptation and the classic serial, a dramatisation of a "classic" (usually 18th, 19th or early 20th century) novel that combines elements of the latter two. Georgina Born notes in her institutional study that the BBC Corporation regards the costume drama and the classic serial in particular as safe formats, almost guaranteed to win ratings where other, riskier formats might fail to do so.[31] For this

---

[30] Ibid.
[31] Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision*.

reason, she suggests, the BBC Corporation is able to justify the relatively large outlay required for the construction of an authentic-looking period drama. Robert Giddings and Keith Selby estimate that, as of the beginning of the 21st century, a costume drama produced for British television "costs about £800,000 for every hour of screen time."[32]

Andrew Higson cites the "carefully detailed and visually splendid period reconstructions" as "among the most frequently noted attractions" of the genre.[33] More broadly, he defines costume drama as that which engages with

> Subject-matter and discourses that have traditionally played a part in determining how the heritage and identity of England and Englishness has been understood. These are films set in the past, telling stories of the manners and proprieties, but also the often transgressive romantic entanglements of the upper- and upper middle-class English.[34]

Julianne Pidduck more specifically claims that "since the 80s, costume film and television have been brimming with queer content and innuendo," an inevitable consequence of a genre that dramatises a "bourgeois" realm "replete with same-sex passions and ambiguously 'queer' sexuality."[35] Rarely until recently however have the "transgressive romantic" elements of BBC costume drama extended beyond forbidden heterosexual love. Relationships within the genre have traditionally spanned class or other social barriers, rather than gender or sexual ones. This can be seen in, for

---

[32] Robert Giddings and Keith Selby, *The Classic Serial on Television and Radio*, p198. Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave, 2001.
[33] Andrew Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama since 1980*, p1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Julianne Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film: Space, Place and the Past*, p139. London: BFI, 2004.

example, *Lady Chatterley* (1993), *Middlemarch* (1994) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), the enormously popular adaptation credited with renewing public interest in the genre.[36] Gay and lesbian elements have emerged in prominent form in period drama on BBC terrestrial channels only since the early 2000s, notably in *Tipping the Velvet* and the LGB-themed historical programmes that followed in subsequent years, shows like *Fingersmith*, *Daphne* (2007) and the 1960s-set *The Long Firm* (2004). In all four cases, gay and lesbian plots, identities and relationships that might have appeared shocking or distasteful, needlessly controversial or too cutting-edge for BBC audiences were tempered by their appearance within the respectable and much-loved period drama format. All four programmes appropriated the respectability and prestige afforded British historical drama and literary adaptation as a means of conveying gay and lesbian stories to audiences who might otherwise have found them offensive, or simply undesirable viewing. All four, to borrow Giddings and Selby's expression, turned "the *Pride and Prejudice* effect" to their advantage in delivering television that was at once sexually other, and identifiably period in content and aesthetic. With particular emphasis on *Tipping the Velvet*, I wish to explore the appropriation of prestige by contemporary gay and lesbian period drama on the BBC, and to examine the means by which issues of sexual diversity have been made palatable to mainstream viewers accustomed to more orthodox historical programming.

Before *Tipping the Velvet* in 2002, there had been at least one firm precedent for the presentation of lesbian desire in a period context on the BBC. The 1990 adaptation of

---

[36] Giddings and Selby, *The Classic Serial on Television and Radio*, p124. They term this phenomenon "the *Pride and Prejudice* effect."

Jeanette Winterson's semi-autobiographical *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* places its

central narrative, the coming-out of a young lesbian from a fervently religious

background, within a recognisable period setting, the 1970s. Despite featuring some

overtly lesbian sexual content, *Oranges* met with little outrage from audiences or media

commentators at the time of its broadcast. This was perhaps surprising, given the

hostility to homosexuality in all forms which permeated the Conservative-dominated

cultural and political spheres of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Hilary Hinds attributes

the lack of moral panic to the show's status as "art" television, a status accrued by means

of its temporal location (a time discernibly past) and its literary origins.[37] Read as "art,"

the lesbian sexuality of *Oranges* was considered to have been entirely warranted by the

demands of its story and so fit for consumption by audiences, on the basis that it was

intended to edify rather than to titillate or simply entertain.

Oranges first appeared on BBC2, in what Emma Smart identifies as the "Wednesday

night 'serious drama' slot previously occupied by the likes of Dennis Potter."[38] This only

consolidated its perceived artistic merit. BBC2 as a channel has been distinguished from

the older and more mainstream BBC1 since its launch in 1964 by its special-interest and

minority-oriented programming, as well as its focus on educational and arts-based

material. Designed as a more highbrow and culturally-diverse companion-piece to the

---

[37] Hilary Hinds, '*Oranges are not the only fruit*: Reaching audiences other texts cannot reach,' p57. Ed.
Tamsin Wilton, *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*. London: Routledge, 1995.
[38] Emma Smart, review of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. *Screen Online*
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/589721/> [24/05/08]. It is also worth noting here BBC2's
predisposition towards ameliorating the contentious nature of some of its programming by presenting
potentially controversial material as part of a season of programming commemorating a specific theme,
often including a "high-brow" combination of drama and documentary. For example, the drama *When I'm
64* (2004), which focused on the development of an unlikely romantic relationship between two elderly
men, was broadcast as part of the *Time of Your Life* season, a week-long series of programmes dedicated
to those issues affecting older citizens.

older channel, BBC2 was largely intended to be as Andrew Crisell puts it, "serious and educative."[39] Its launch, Crisell claims, marked "the hesitant beginning of television narrowcasting" in the UK, in that "there was a variety of programmes, but many of them-and their overall packaging and presentation-wore a rather more sedate and thoughtful air than those of BBC1."[40] Tellingly, BBC2 was also the first BBC channel to meet major success in broadcasting a "serious" adapted period drama, the 1967 version of John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* (1967) that reached some 18 million viewers when repeated on BBC1 the following year. Roy Pierce-Jones observes that this 1967 *Forsyte Saga* "contained content far more adult than would have been allowed previously," and suggests that its success "paved the way for far more adaptations of literary texts that dealt with these adult themes."[41] The result, he notes, was that "BBC2 became the channel that offered Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Balzac and Zola, rather than Dickens and Austen"- mature adaptations of cerebral European novels, as opposed to "the cosy, traditional tea-time serials" associated with England's literary heritage.[42] This aspect of the channel's brand identity, its propensity to deliver intelligent costume drama on adult themes, carried forward into the 1990s and 2000s as it continued to inform BBC scheduling decisions. It was within this broadcasting context that *Tipping the Velvet* first appeared on British television, and it is within this context that the show is best understood as an example of gay and lesbian period drama.

---

[39] Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, p114. London: Routledge, 1997. For a more detailed account of the inception and professed core values of BBC2, see Asa Briggs, *A History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (New Edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
[40] Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, pp114-5.
[41] Roy Pierce-Jones, 'Screening the short stories: from the 1950s to the 1990s,' p67. Ed. T. R. Wright, *Thomas Hardy on Screen.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. A fuller discussion of the 1967 *Forsyte Saga* is provided in Iris Kleinecke-Bates, *Victorian Realities: Representations of the Victorian Age in 1990s Television* (unpublished thesis).
[42] Ibid.

First broadcast in October 2002 and adapted from the 1998 Sarah Waters's novel of the same name, *Tipping the Velvet* told the story of Nan Astley (Rachael Stirling), a lesbian oyster-girl turned male impersonator turned prostitute, and the series of relationships with women on which she embarks in Victorian era London. The show displayed many of the typical hallmarks of costume drama that Andrew Higson describes, chiefly luxuriously detailed period settings, lavish costumes and "picturesque" landscapes.[43] From the undeveloped Kentish coastline of its opening sequence to the dirty, overcrowded *fin-de-siècle* London in which its protagonist eventually finds herself, the show was firmly and visibly rooted in the late 19th century. The elaborate corsets, bodices, hats and bustles sported by the majority of the cast necessarily confirmed the impression of a narrative located in an earlier time. They also confirmed, particularly when considered alongside with cinematography that captured the reconstructed urban and coastal Victorian landscapes, that a great deal of the BBC's money had been spent in bringing Waters' novel to the screen.

In marketing terms, the period aesthetic of the show was complemented by the high-profile involvement in its production of the screenwriter Andrew Davies. Widely proclaimed as "King of the TV costume drama," Davies has also become, as Peter Swaab observes "the first choice [of producers and commissioning editors] for literary adaptations on British television."[44] Davies' attachment alone brought invaluable prestige to the programme, lending it some of the cultural cachet of the writer's earlier big-budget projects, which at that point included *Middlemarch*, *Vanity Fair* (1998),

---

[43] Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema*, p1.
[44] Peter Swaab, review of *The Line of Beauty*, p10. *Film Quarterly* 60:3, 2007.

Moll Flanders (1996) for ITV, and the best-known adaptation of them all, *Pride and Prejudice*. The BBC was not averse to capitalising on his reputation and past achievements for promotional purposes. A press release issued by the Corporation several months prior to the show's initial broadcast hailed it as "an Andrew Davies adaptation," and its protagonist Nan Astley as "a heroine as appealing and charismatic as Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*" embroiled into "a series of adventures which recall that earlier heroine Moll Flanders."[45]

Distinguishing Nan from these earlier heroines, though, was the matter of her lesbianism. Just as the robust heterosexuality of Bennet and Flanders informed the narrative trajectories of their respective texts and subsequent adaptations thereof, so Nan's attraction to women determined the very shape and substance of *Tipping the Velvet*. If hers is a period televisual *Bildungsroman* in the style of *Moll Flanders*, then it is one inextricably connected with her sexual orientation, as much about her coming out in Victorian England as her coming of age. The first sequences of the show's opening episode allude to this connection. Against a montage of shots of fish markets and sandy beachfronts which convey a sense of the oyster trade into which she was born, and a more lingering shot of a young Nan shelling oysters in the family parlour, an older and wiser Nan first asserts in voiceover that the story is "about me, Nan Astley, and I was nothing then [...] But open an oyster and there's a secret world in there. And that's how it was with me." The use of voiceover in this context immediately calls to mind the *Bildungsroman*. Nan's hint at the "secret world" within her readies the audience for the

---

[45] 'BBC Press Release for *Tipping the Velvet* 12th March 2002' at BBC.co.uk
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2002/03_march/12/tippingthevelvet.shtml>
[25/05/08]

sexual twist soon to be given to the genre. Later in the episode, after she witnesses the cross-dressing variety star Kitty Butler (Keeley Hawes) performing on stage, this "secret world" is revealed to centre on an unexplored desire for women, and specifically for Kitty. As Nan confides in her sister,

> When I see her it's like […] she makes me want to smile and weep at once […] I never, ever saw a girl like that before. I never knew there *were* girls like that before. I don't know what it is. I don't know what's the matter with me.

Contemporary audiences familiar with gay and lesbian coming out discourses and practices know perfectly well "what's the matter," even if the Victorian Nan does not. Nan is attracted to women, is gay and is in articulating her desires to another person on her way to realising the 'truth' of her identity.

While period in setting, *Tipping the Velvet* is distinctly contemporary in tone, and exhibits an ideological disposition towards themes and positions more readily identifiable with the 20th century than the 19th. This in itself is unsurprising. Television drama, even costume drama, must necessarily engage with contemporary concerns if it is to remain interesting and relevant to audiences. Of the 'classic' literary adaptation genre, Giddings and Selby argue that

> The selection and treatment of subject matter […] is considerably affected by contemporary cultural considerations. Subject matter has to be suited to contemporary taste, and presented in a style and manner which makes it palatable to modern

audiences […] It is not simply a matter of archaeology. The past is not only dug up, it has to be restored to life in a form which is acceptable to modern consumer taste.[46]

Tipping the Velvet the novel was published in 1998. It is not in any way a legitimate historical document of the Victorian age, nor does it purport to be.[47] However, as evidenced by the money clearly spent on period costume and authentic recreations of Victorian England, the BBC aimed to convey at least a degree of historical accuracy in *Tipping the Velvet* the programme. Like *Bramwell* (1995), an original ITV historical drama to which Giddings and Selby refer, *Tipping the Velvet* "tells a modern story […] set in a rich late Victorian period context. A very great deal of trouble has been gone to in order to 'recreate' the look, feel and sense of the past."[48] In this respect, the show may be regarded in very much the same way as other BBC costume dramas with a more established literary heritage. Like them, it aims to "restore to life" the past in a way that satisfies the sensibilities of contemporary viewers.

The transposition of 20th century ideas about and around sexual identity to a Victorian setting is only one of the ways in which *Tipping the Velvet* sought to gratify its audiences. Its take on sexuality is essentialist, in keeping with the "identitarian" stances on the immutability of sexual orientation that Carl Stychin sees as proliferating in the neoliberal cultural climate of the 1990s and 2000s.[49] Nan simply *is* a lesbian, a "tom," as the show later characterises her. Little to no ambiguity surrounds her sexual identity. There is no negotiation and no disjunction between her outward behaviour and the

---

[46] Giddings and Selby, *The Classic Serial on Television and Radio*, p209.
[47] Sarah Waters, *Tipping the Velvet*. London: Virago, 1999.
[48] Giddings and Selby, *The Classic Serial on Television and Radio*, p199.
[49] Carl F. Stychin, 'Being Gay,' pp104. *Government and Opposition* 40:1, 2005.

inner thoughts to which her voiceover grants access, except in the very early minutes of the programme, before her first encounter with Kitty. There is only the steady real-life unfolding of the "secret world" inside her. Her entrance into the Victorian lesbian community of Davies' adaptation follows a well-known course. She meets a woman and is attracted to her, identifies her feelings as romantic in basis and acts upon them, further recognises through her actions what she innately *is*, a "tom," and seeks out and is sought out by other women ostensibly like her as a result. These women recognise in her an inherent otherness. This is most apparent in the show's third episode, most overtly when Nan is considered by another "tom," Annie (Diane Beck) as a potential suitor or "uncle" for a third woman, Florence (Jodhi May) before she has made public her sexual and romantic inclinations.

Judith Butler among others has condemned the contemporary coming out process for its tendency to label all instances in a (gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer) individual's life false or meaningless until the declamatory coming out moment. She has also critiqued the identitarian emphasis on coming out of the closet versus staying in it. This, she argues, serves only to create a false binary between "in" and "out" states.[50] *Tipping the Velvet*, though, is strictly identitarian in its narrative application of gender politics. Nan's observation, "I was nothing then" adheres firmly to an in/out dichotomy that aligns being openly gay with "unbounded spatiality," truth and "the light of illumination," as well as personal growth.[51] The show's denouement also favoured a contemporary identitarian position, stylistically as well as narratively. Confronted with

[50] Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination'. Ed. Diane Fuss, *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. London: Routledge, 1991.
[51] Ibid, p16.

the choice to remain with Florence, who lives openly as a lesbian, or to return to Kitty, who requires that she remain "careful" and closeted, Nan opts for the former. Throwing a rose to Florence from the stage as she performs, she quite literally turns the spotlight upon her and her seat in the stalls, while the rejected Kitty skulks in the shadows of the balcony. The point could not have been more clearly articulated. Florence represents warmth and the promised "light of illumination," Kitty only the suffocating darkness of the closet. This decision functions to signify the pinnacle of Nan's emotional development and complete acceptance of her "secret" self.

Jeffrey Weeks warns against accepting sexual identity as fixed, as an immutable thing-in-itself present in a certain percentage of the population throughout history. Rather, he suggests,

> such identities are historically and culturally specific [..,] they are selected from a host of possible social identities, [..,] they are not necessary attributes of particular sexual drives or desires [..,] and [...] they are not, in fact, essential- that is naturally pre-given aspects of our personality.[52]

Lesbianism and lesbian cultures as they are lived and understood in contemporary Britain are necessarily different from lesbianism and lesbian cultures as they were lived and understood in the late nineteenth century. As Weeks notes, "the lesbian identity-whatever its 'true' meaning-is historically contingent," a product of a specific time and a

---

[52] Jeffrey Weeks, 'Questions of Identity,' p31. Ed. Patricia Caplan, *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*. London: Routledge, 1987.

specific place.[53] However, at no point in *Tipping the Velvet* can any trace be discerned of a line of thought which might mark the incidence of Victorian lesbianism as significantly different from the twentieth and twenty-first century experiences of the same. Rather, *Tipping the Velvet* presents a version of nineteenth century history daubed in distinctly contemporary colours, relocating contemporary values and value-judgements to a period setting almost wholesale.

The plotting of Nan's sexual encounters similarly calls to mind a contemporary lesbian experience. Moving within a relatively short space of time from Kitty to the aristocratic Diana Leatherby (Anna Chancellor) to the servant Zena Blake (Sally Hawkins) to Florence via a string of male clients rendered humorously grotesque by unflattering close-ups, camera-angle distorts and carnivalesque facial and bodily contortions of the actors in question, Nan rarely lacks for female attention within the show's narrative, even during her stint as a cross-dressing prostitute. As her early encounter with Florence indicates, she is able even to pick up women in the street with some ease. If she is assumed to represent a kind of woman through whom the viewer might be inducted into the 19th century lesbian experience, Nan's sexual endeavours serve to defy one culturally-entrenched perception of pre-20th century gay culture- specifically, that a lesbian life in late Victorian England was necessarily covert, isolated and unhappy. Nan is never lonely for long, and certainly is far from unhappy by the final sequences of the programme. Smiling broadly and strolling hand-in-hand with Florence along the open seafront, she seems positvely overcome with happiness, her decision to live openly as a lesbian having paid dividends. As the heart-shaped zoom-in shot that precedes the

---

[53] Ibid, p47.

credits suggests, hers is to be a contented and fulfilling romantic life, defined by her unwillingness to accede to the pressures of the closet.

With specific reference to *Tipping the Velvet* and the earlier Vita Sackville-West biopic *Portrait of a Marriage* (1990), Julianne Pidduck points to British public service broadcasting as a "facilitator" of lesbian period television.[54] British cinema, she notes, has provided "an abundance of gay male characters in period productions," while "lesbian appearances have been less frequent."[55] On British television, and especially on the BBC, the reverse has been the case. Lesbian themes have predominated in period drama, where gay masculinity has gone largely unexplored. This reversal can be attributed to three related factors: the perceived marketability of lesbianism to television audiences, the relative historical invisibility of lesbian, bisexual and queer women, and crucial differences in format between British cinema and British television.

Pidduck posits the notion of gay male authorship as significant in the branding and marketing of LGBT period cinema. Within this cinema, she notes, the figure of "the contained (male) genius" proliferates, with films about or derived from source texts by prominent gay authors and artists from an array of historical periods saturating the costume drama market.[56] As examples of this "abundance" she cites among several major films released in the 1980s and 1990s. *Maurice* (1987), an adaptation of E.M. Forster's notorious novel, is another gay *bildungsroman*, this time with a male protagonist. *Caravaggio* (1986) is a Derek Jarman-directed biopic of the gay Italian

---

54 Julianne Pidduck, *Contemporary Costume Film*, p143.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid, p149.

painter. *Total Eclipse* (1995) documents an affair between the poets Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine. *Wilde* (1997) dramatises the life and trial of the playwright Oscar Wilde. *Love is the Devil* (1998) is based around the artist Francis Bacon's sadomasochistic gay relationship with a petty criminal, and *Gods and Monsters* (1998) is a fictionalised retelling of the last days of the openly gay film director James Whale. In each case, the gay male "genius" is placed centrally and in such a way as to encourage audiences to interpret their presence as authorial, as a brand marker. This gay male authorship and the branding process that it enables is of particular financial importance to filmmakers and distributors in that it figures, as Pidduck argues, "through cultural and commercial intertexts."[57] Directors, producers, and distributors are able to capitalise on the recognisability of such gay male brand names as Wilde and Forster to attract audiences keen to watch a film *about* a historical figure, rather than *by* a certain director, or *featuring* a certain star. Such brand names may also be prized by distributors for their tie-in potential. After watching a film about the trial of Oscar Wilde, for example, audiences may actively seek out his original drama or poetry, read one of his many biographies, or go back to the cinema to watch an adaptation of one of his plays.[58]

The number of gay male artists, authors and historical figures dramatised by British period film, and the relative invisibility of lesbian women therein, correlates directly to a similar profusion and lack in documented history. This has much to do with the amount of legal and institutional attention afforded male homosexuality and lesbianism

---

[57] Ibid.

[58] Indeed, the release of filmed versions of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002) and *An Ideal Husband* (1999) successfully capitalised on the Wilde brand and contributed to the "widespread US.UK 90s Wilde revival" spawned by the biopic (Ibid, p150).

accordingly. As Foucault has shown, gay and bisexual male identities have crystallised

historically around those religious, legal medical discourses that identified and

delineated them as perverse, deviant and unnatural, as "other."[59] Lesbian identities, in

the absence of persecutory but identity-defining meta-narratives, have tended towards

what Jackie Stacey calls "fragmented subjectivity."[60] Unconstrained by such discourses,

while bound by other more insidious patriarchal pressures, "the lesbian experience" has

been too vast in its scope and range to neatly encapsulate, as gay male experiences of the

past have been encapsulated. It is impossible, she says, to

> assume any coherent or unified collective identity when we recognise the diversity of
>
> definitions and experiences of lesbians... Lesbian experiences are not only fragmented
>
> within "lesbian cultures," but also within cultures dominated by heterosexuality, in
>
> which lesbians are ascribed the contradictory positions of the invisible presence.[61]

Male writers and artists defined as homosexual in their own lifetimes by homophobic

institutional discourses may easily be reclaimed as gay icons by subsequent generations

and, once reclaimed may be explored as such in film. Lesbian and bisexual female

writers and artists are less easily reclaimable.[62] Martha Vicinus refers to a specifically

---

[59] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: 1*. London: Penguin, 1998.
[60] Jackie Stacey, in Martha Vicinus, '"They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong": The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity,' p468. *Feminist Studies* 18: 3, 1992.
[61] Ibid.
[62] There are a handful of films which see queer female authors reclaimed by contemporary directors for contemporary audiences, notably *The Hours* (2002), which focuses in part on the bisexual Virginia Woolf, *Waiting for the Moon* (1987), about Gertrude Stein, *Frida* (2002), about the artist Frida Kahlo, and the recent Jane Austen biopic *Becoming Jane* (2007). None of these were entirely British, however: *The Hours* was a joint UK/US production, *Waiting for the Moon* a British/French/American/West German co-production, *Frida* North American and Mexican, and *Becoming Jane* part-funded by the Irish Film Board.

lesbian history as "a history of discontinuities."[63] In the absence of court cases like Wilde's, wherein a male defendant's sexual behaviour might be laid bare for a jury in explicit detail,

> we rarely know precisely what women in the past did with each other in bed or out, and we are not able to reconstruct fully how and under what circumstances lesbian communities evolved. […] We […] know all too little about the legal position of lesbians, in comparison with the far richer documentation of the oppression of gay men.[64]

If LGB period cinema often relies on male historical figures to capture audience interest, LGB period television (particularly on the BBC) does so by appealing to audience familiarity with the generic conventions of the costume drama. British television has less need than cinema to generate interest in costume drama as a genre, since audience interest already exists. The BBC, as Giddings and Selby note, continues to reap the benefits of "the *Pride and Prejudice* effect." Jason Mittell suggests that,

> there are specifics of the television industry that have no precedents or parallels in film paradigms. For instance, scheduling practices are a central mechanism for television programmers to distinguish between shows, creating distinctions that have clear genre repercussions […] but no real parallels in other media.[65]

Cinema has no "scheduling practices" by which it might mark out specific films as period dramas. Television does, and the BBC's scheduling in particular goes a long way

---

[63] Ibid, p470
[64] Ibid.
[65] Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television*, pxiv.

towards identifying certain of its programmes as costume dramas, and so as appealing to those viewers with an interest in the genre. Sunday evening, when both *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith* were first broadcast, has long served as the primary costume drama timeslot on both BBC1 and BBC2. Costume dramas shown on either channel at this time have attracted high ratings almost across the board for many years. Within such a timeslot, on channels operated by a broadcaster renowned for its ability to produce quality historical programming, a period drama has a very good chance of success. There is less necessity for individual shows to cash-in on the marketability of gay brand-names in order to sell themselves, since the costume drama genre alone is sufficiently marketable. Lesbian period narratives focusing on characters other than real life "geniuses" can therefore be told and are likely to appeal to costume drama fans in spite of both their lesbianism and their lack of any recognisably lesbian artistic or historical figures.

BBC2's *Daphne* was a significant exception to BBC period television's tendency to dramatise the lives of unknown, fictional lesbian women above known, real life gay men. Screened in May 2007 as part of a BBC season celebrating the 100th anniversary of the writer Daphne du Maurier's birth, the show relied heavily on audience recognition of du Maurier as a brand name in order to tell its story, that of the writer's unrequited love for one woman, Ellen Doubleday, and her affair with another, the actress Gertrude Lawrence. Like Wilde, Forster and the many other male historical figures hovering as intertextual authorial figures around much British period cinema, du Maurier is a known quantity, her bisexuality a matter of historical document, and the programme's narrative hinged upon the elaboration of this sexuality. The show's format also shared

184

more in common with contemporary costume film than with lesbian period drama like *Tipping the Velvet*, since it was broadcast as a 90 minute television-film rather than a series in the classic serial mould spanning several episodes. These deviations from the lesbian period drama conventions established by *Tipping the Velvet* and continued by *Fingersmith* and others, though, suggested how *Daphne* ought perhaps to be understood: not as lesbian television costume drama, per se, but as a lesbian costume film that happened to be screened on television.

The relative marketability of period lesbianism versus period homosexuality is a further consideration in assessing the greater prevalence of female sexuality in BBC costume drama. As discussed above, LGB period cinema frequently capitalises upon depictions of and associations with famous gay men in order to market itself to the public, where LGB period television tends to rely on prestige attached to the genre within which it appears. Bar a few exceptions, fictionalised male homosexuality without an illustrious gay literary heritage has largely been overlooked by both film and television formats, at least in a period context. The BBC has in recent years provided viewers with serial adaptations of Jake Arnott's *The Long Firm* and Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2006). In both adaptations, however, the historical backdrop to the male homosexuality foregrounded is more contemporary than might be expected of a period drama. *The Long Firm* is set principally in the 1960s, *The Line of Beauty* in the early 1980s. As of 2008, no gay male-centric drama set before the mid-20th century has appeared on either BBC1 or BBC2.

Paradoxically, this absence may be partially ascribed to the very historical visibility to which Martha Vicinus refers. Screening the gay male past necessarily involves reference to the many constraints placed upon gay male sexual behaviour, and to the punishments doled out to those who transgressed. Unlike those biopics of gay and bisexual "great men" like Wilde and Rimbaud, that inevitably appeal to audiences primarily on the basis of their explorations of this greatness, period narratives depicting the lives of ordinary or fictional gay men must engage directly the legislative persecutions which once defined gay male existence, potentially to the point where such engagement may overwhelm any and all other narrative concerns. Indeed, one of the very few British television programmes to place gay masculinity in a historical context, BBC4's *Consenting Adults*, did just this, dramatising the machinations of the Wolfenden Committee and Committee Chairman John Wolfenden's complex relationship with his gay son.[66] It is also worth considering the extent to which the necessary depiction of the period gay/bisexual man as marginalised and persecuted victim runs counter to the hyper-consumerist contemporary gay male figure so prevalent in British media and cultural spheres, and discussed at length in the previous chapter. In a cultural climate that actively promotes images of assimilated homosexuality, the image of the period gay man as a victim of state persecution makes for uncomfortable viewing.

The historical invisibility of lesbianism works in this respect to its advantage. With no extensive legacy of legal vilification to define it and, as Vicinus and others note, few records of any kind to constrain the creativity of the screenwriter, period lesbianism

---

[66] Tellingly, the drama was broadcast on BBC4 in September 2007 as part of its *Hidden Lives* Week focusing on the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK. *50 Years On* (2007), a very similar series of programmes, also dealing with the Wolfenden Report and its legacy appeared on Channel 4 at around the same time.

represents something of a blank slate onto which producers and broadcasters may inscribe their own interpretations of lesbian history. Unlike the persecuted gay man of the British past, the period lesbian can be fun, as "colourful, passionate, entertaining" shows like *Tipping the Velvet* duly demonstrate.[67]

In contemporary media depictions, "fun" lesbianism very often equates to desirability and sexual availability. Lesbian narratives and televised expressions of certain kinds of highly-feminised lesbian sexuality are frequently marketed on the strength of the attraction they are imagined to hold for male heterosexual audiences. Lesbian period drama is regrettably no exception. *Tipping the Velvet* in particular was sold to potential male viewers as a titillating lesbian experience. When asked in interview why young men might be interested in his adaptation, Andrew Davies replied, "two women fucking-each other."[68] His response underscores the extent to which on-screen sex between (feminine-looking) women is produced with a view to appealing erotically to men, even as it appears within a period drama context. As Rebecca Beirne asserts, mainstream television tends to favour erotically "consumerable" depictions of lesbians, just as it favours representations of *consuming* gay men. Of the US lesbian drama *The L Word*, she observes,

> We have images that have been constructed for a heterosexual media and populace, at
> least in part, which embody [...] measures of acquiescence for economic and political

[67] BBC Press Release for *Tipping the Velvet*
[68] 'Davies pens steamy Chatterley drama.' *Guardian*, 22nd January 2003.

purposes of peaceable inclusion and integration, which are considered to be particularly

necessary for the medium with which they are engaged.[69]

The observation can be applied equally to the BBC's images of period lesbianism. Like
Fingersmith and *Daphne*, *Tipping the Velvet* offered a surfeit of attractive, heavily
made-up and flatteringly-lit female characters, characters who despite their propensity
for dressing up as boys seemed never less than glamorously femme. Though ostensibly
soft-butch in dress and manner, they bear many outward markers of stylised femininity:
tousled hair, girlishly soft voices, rouged lips, eyes darkened with kohl and mascara.

The femininity of the BBC's lesbian historical characters goes some way towards offering
them to audiences, not only as sops to heterosexual male fantasy, but as the non-
threatening face of lesbian desire. Representations of butch women frequently signify
what Judith Halberstam calls "masculinity without men."[70] As Sally Munt notes,
butches have tended to occupy "an outlaw position" in terms of their exteriority both to
male fantasy and to the standard sets of male/ female and hetero/ homo binaries.[71] They
can be regarded as having, as she puts it, "exited the heteropatriarchy."[72] Femmes
conversely often serve to connote through their appropriation of the physical signifiers
of stereotypical heterosexual femininity a specific kind of sexual availability, that is,
availability to heterosexual men. For heterosexual audiences less accustomed to
television depictions of lesbian sex in a period drama context, femme lesbian characters

---

[69] Rebecca Beirne, 'Fashioning *The L Word*,' p3. *Nebula* 3:4, 2006.
[70] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998.
[71] Sally R. Munt, *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space*, p96. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
[72] Ibid.

may appear far less obviously threatening than butch equivalents thereof. Like the consumerist model of gay masculinity popular in British programmes set in the contemporary world and discussed in the previous chapter, the feminised version of 19th and early 20th century lesbianism that predominates in LGB period drama shows on the BBC is very easily digestible by straight viewers, inasmuch as it represents only a minimal aesthetic departure from conventional heterosexual femininity. For the BBC as for Channel 4, this has much to do with the necessity of appealing to mainstream audiences, audiences statistically likely to be predominantly heterosexual.

"You people and your quaint little categories": *Torchwood*'s Queer Utopia

If lesbian period drama allows the BBC to present a British past wherein queer sexuality could be unproblematically expressed, at least between women, its queer science fiction promotes images of a future that is nothing less than utopian in its sexual and gender politics. This queer sci-fi is most prominently represented by the most recent incarnation of the Corporation's long-running and enormously popular *Doctor Who* franchise (1963-) and its more adult-themed spin-off show *Torchwood*. The latter programme is, as Neil Perryman observes, "an expansion of the *Doctor Who* universe/world which flows across […] audience […] channels."[73] The contemporary *Doctor Who* focuses on the adventures of the titular Doctor and his various Companions across time and space, and is at the time of writing the longest-running science fiction programme in television history. *Torchwood* follows the personal and professional lives

---

[73] Neil Perryman, 'Doctor Who and the Convergence of Media: A Case Study in 'Transmedia Storytelling," p35. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14:1, 2008.

of a group of agents based in the Torchwood Three institute, the Cardiff branch of an organisation dedicated to hunting dangerous extraterrestrial creatures and scavenging alien technologies. A great deal of cross-over exists between the two shows. Although *Torchwood* operates within "an arena of visceral horror, graphic sex and extremely strong language" that the pre-watershed *Doctor Who* largely avoids, it features in Perryman's words "characters, infrastructure and aliens explicitly connected to the world of *Doctor Who*," and "actively explores narrative mysteries introduced in the parent show."[74] Most importantly, the BBC itself characterises *Torchwood* as a "companion series" of *Doctor Who*, and has marketed it to audiences accordingly.[75]

While both programmes contain significant queer elements and secondary characters, the queerness of the *Doctor Who*/*Torchwood* universe manifests most obviously in Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman), *Torchwood*'s main character and a recurring figure in its parent show. A 51st century con man turned time-travelling alien hunter and leader of Torchwood 3, Captain Jack is actively pansexual and enjoys a variety of sexual and romantic partners in *Torchwood*'s first two series. These have included co-worker Ianto Jones (Gareth David-Lloyd), fellow Time Agent Captain John Hart (James Marsters), a younger incarnation of elderly fairy enthusiast Estelle Cole (Eve Pearce, 'Small Worlds') and Captain Jack Harkness (Matt Rippey), a World War II pilot from whom he steals both name and identity ('Captain Jack Harkness'). His *Doctor Who* appearances are marked by his flirtations with men and women, humans and aliens (including The Doctor himself), and he alludes throughout both series to an array

---

[74] Ibid.
[75] BBC Statements of Programme Policy 2006/2007, p98. London: BBC.

of past boyfriends and girlfriends on multiple planets, across many thousands of years. In addition to his functions within the narrative arc of the shows, he also serves to introduce contemporary BBC viewers to a future wherein sexual orientation has ceased to convey any meaningful insight into individual identity or sexual behaviour. His pansexuality, as he claims in a number of *Torchwood* episodes, is a direct product of his 51st century origins. This claim is corroborated by the (mostly) benign indifference of the time-travelling Doctor to any and all forms of sexuality, and the arrival in Torchwood series two of the similarly pansexual Captain John Hart, who likes men, and women, and animals, and aliens. In the future as defined by the *Torchwood/Doctor Who* universe, queer behaviour and sexual fluidity have become the norm, the "quaint little categories" ('Day One') of gay and straight, normal and aberrant long since abandoned in favour of a less divisive approach more conducive to the exploration of greater individual pleasure. The pre-watershed *Doctor Who*, whose mostly-asexual lead character conveniently allows the show to eschew most forms of overt sexuality, can only allude to these future norms, albeit with its much-celebrated "ethos of liberality and open-mindedness."[76] *Torchwood*, though, enthusiastically engages with them, transposing the imagined sexual ethics of the 51st century to the 21st through its strategic deployment of culturally evolved and sexually prolific characters.

Torchwood promotes a pansexual future as imagined by poststructuralist queer theory, a future in which the hetero/homosexual binary has been entirely destabilised and the immanence and fixity of sexual orientation successfully challenged. This future

---

[76] Ed Hagan, 'Why does the gay community love *Doctor Who*?'
<http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/tv/2007/06/why_does_the_gay_community_lov.html> [06/06/08]

complements perfectly the past as imagined by the BBC, while circumventing the cumbersome identity politics that weigh down so much lesbian and occasionally gay period drama. Just as this period drama promotes the cultural assimilation of non-hetero sexualities by retroactively inserting them into historical narratives, so its most popular sci-fi takes the assimilationist project further in affording its audiences glimpses of a future wherein queerness dominates the cultural and sexual mainstreams. With the help of *Doctor Who/Torchwood* writer-producer Russell T. Davies, himself a recognisably gay brand since his success with the Channel 4 drama *Queer as Folk*, the BBC have here too borrowed the kudos afforded earlier shows for queer ends, appropriating an established genre (science fiction) and an established brand (the *Doctor Who* franchise) as vehicles for the communication of ostensibly radical ideas about sexual behaviour and identity.

That a science fiction format should be used to convey these ideas is perhaps unsurprising. As a print genre sci-fi has been, as Henry Jenkins notes, "historically open to gay, lesbian and bisexual writers who could express their sexuality in disguised but potent form."[77] It has offered its non-heterosexual readers (and then also its audiences) "many different kinds of utopia [..,] many different worlds, many different realities, many different futures" which were often preferable to the oppressively homophobic cultural and political climates out of which the stories emerged.[78] Along with this "openness," Jenkins also identifies a "key shift" in the genre's attitude to queerness in recent years, apparent in its "movement from early science fiction stories that treated

---

[77] Henry Jenkins and John Tulloch, *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek*, p243. London: Routledge, 1995.
[78] Ibid.

homosexuality as profoundly alien, towards stories that deal with queer characters as a normal part of the narrative universe and that treat sexuality as simply one aspect of their characterisation."[79] The narrative universe of *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood* typifies this trend, both through its integration of queer characters and through its suggestion that given world enough and time, "normal" human sexuality tends inexorably towards queerness.

The appropriation of the *Doctor Who* franchise by an openly gay producer and the subsequent introduction of queer themes, plots and characters into this narrative universe is a less radical move than might first be imagined. As Jenkins and John Tulloch observe, the series has long appealed to non-heterosexual viewers around the world, and has spawned a considerable gay and lesbian fan base that has made significant contributions to the extra-textual *Doctor Who* narratives produced around the official broadcast material.[80] Before the terms "media convergence" and "textual poaching" had currency in cultural (and cultural studies) spheres, gay and lesbian sci-fi fans were appropriating the Doctor and his universe to tell their own stories, mostly in print form. In 1990, Virgin Publishing obtained licensing rights to the franchise from the BBC, and subsequently published a series of originals novels set within the *Doctor Who* universe. Virgin operated what Neil Perryman calls "an open submissions policy" on the novels, which meant that "fans could submit story proposals regardless of their experience (or lack thereof) in professional publishing and *anyone* could potentially contribute to the official *Doctor Who* mythos."[81] This "anyone" encompassed gay and

---

[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid, xii.
[81] Neil Perryman, 'Doctor Who and the Convergence of Media,' p24.

lesbian contributors and those seeking to introduce queer themes and characters into the franchise, and included Russell T. Davies, whose 1996 novel *Damaged Goods* engaged with just these narrative elements.[82] The increasingly widespread use of internet technologies in the last decade has only augmented the gay and lesbian *Doctor Who* fan base, allowing for the development of an already strongly participatory LGB fan culture. It has in turn generated a vast number of fan-written homoerotic 'slash' fictions, mostly focusing on the hypothetical romantic adventures of the Doctor and other male characters.[83] Ed Hagan posits that the very character of the Doctor inspires respect and admiration among gay and lesbian audiences, and has done since the early years of the show, where he "was established as an innocent in ways of human love and prejudice, happy to befriend anyone as long as they were good people."[84] More than that, he has "always been a little bit anti-establishment," always willing to defend "the persecuted and the oppressed" against malignant and tyrannical forces like the Daleks and the Cybermen. He has therefore cut "an attractive figure for a young person growing up and feeling a little bit different from everybody else."[85] Davies himself has referenced the show's gay appeal in his earlier television productions. One of the gay male leads of *Queer as Folk*, Vince, is an avid collector of *Doctor Who* video tapes and memorabilia, and is at one stage shown watching an early episode in lieu of sex with a man whom he

---

[82] Russell T. Davies, *The New Doctor Who Adventures: Damaged Goods*. London: Virgin Publishing, 1996.

[83] Henry Jenkins offers this definition: ""The colorful term, "slash," refers to the convention of employing a stroke or "slash" to signify a same-sex relationship between two characters [...] and specifies a genre of fan stories positing homoerotic affairs between series protagonists." (Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, p186. London: Routledge, 1992). *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood* slash fictions can be found at many online locations, but a significant number are archived at <http://www.whofic.com/>

[84] Ed Hagan, 'Why does the gay community love *Doctor Who*?'

[85] Ibid.

picked up in a bar, who is as it transpires an even more enthusiastic *Who* fan than Vince himself.

The current queer appropriation of the *Doctor Who* universe is surprising only in that it is officially sanctioned by the BBC. *Torchwood* is not slash fiction of the kind circulated on the internet, nor is it stop-gap material supplied to dedicated audiences in the absence of any authentic televised material, as the Virgin novels were. It is authentic, as legitimate a representation of the franchise and its world as any of the BBC1 serials, and its canonicity is undoubted. It bears the endorsement of the Corporation responsible for its production and broadcast, which has explicitly deemed it canonical, a "companion" piece to be considered alongside the original series. Given that the BBC's 2006/7 Statements of Programme Promises deemed Davies' *Doctor Who* "the television highlight in a year of significant contributions to the television and radio networks," this constitutes firm endorsement indeed.[86] Given also the lesbian content of some of the BBC's recent period drama, it is easy enough to imagine that this endorsement extends to the queer-utopian ideals espoused by the *Torchwood* narrative. The BBC has professed a commitment to "reflecting the diversity of the UK,"[87] and is bound by the terms of the public service remit laid out in the 2003 Communications Act to ensure "that cultural activity in the United Kingdom, and its diversity, are reflected, supported and stimulated" in and by its broadcast services.[88] The celebration of diverse sexual cultures seems to run counter to the vision of the future which *Torchwood* proposes and the BBC endorses, a future wherein sexual categories have been eroded and disparate

---

[86] BBC Statements of Programme Promises 2006/2007, p99. London: BBC.
[87] 'Reports, Policies and Guidelines: Equal opportunities at the BBC' at BBC.co.uk http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/policies/diversity.shtml [07/06/08].
[88] Communications Act 2003 c.21.

sexual identities amalgamated under the pansexuality umbrella. As an example of BBC policy in action, *Torchwood* does not so much promote cultural diversity as homogenise existing sexual cultures and promote this homogeneity as desirable, utopian. This homogenisation as it occurs within *Torchwood* can also be interpreted as a precautionary measure on the BBC's part, a means of preventing the alienation of audiences who might take offence at the on-screen presentation of an avowedly gay sexual identity. While not quite a "point of identification" for all heterosexual viewers, the show's brand of pansexuality tempts non-homophobic and cosmopolitan audiences with the possibility of straight romance as well as queer. It also offers voyeuristic cosmopolitan pleasures to those seeking it in the very queerness of its narrative. Like Captain Jack, most of the major characters (agents Gwen (Eve Myles), Tosh (Naoko Mori) and Owen (Burn Gorman) and Jack's on-off love interest, Torchwood Three administrator Ianto engage in both opposite and same-sex encounters over the course of the show. In the *Torchwood* universe, expressions of opposite-sex sexuality are as likely to occur as instances of same-sex sexuality, as a result of the pansexual-utopian ideals it espouses. These ideals can therefore easily be read as an attempt to broaden the show's appeal. They serve as an example of the BBC seeking to boost ratings by casting its net beyond science fiction fans and the LGBT community, and over self-styled cosmopolitan audiences who might dismiss such genre television, were it not for the spectacles of queer and straight sex. Combined, these spectacles offer such viewers different but complementary kinds of viewing pleasure.

As Glen Creeber observes, the BBC has also historically upheld a separate policy that runs counter to the cultivation of cultural diversity, that of "constructing a deep sense of

national consciousness and consensus."[89] He notes that "despite its apparent commitment to diversity" the BBC has "tended to homogenise both its vision of "culture" and its image of "Britishness."" Presenting a vision of a unified culture to audiences inevitably means overlooking or failing to represent those minority cultures existing within the wide national culture, including sexual minority cultures. The BBC has fallen prey over the years to numerous and well-documented accusations of insufficiently representing minority groups. As recently as 2006, the Corporation was accused by Stonewall of failing to cater sufficiently to the needs of lesbian and gay audiences.[90] Instead, as programmes like *Torchwood* and *Tipping the Velvet* demonstrate, the BBC has tended to broadcast and commission shows that see non-heterosexuals assimilated into the dominant culture, rather than recognised as a minority group existing *within* that culture. More often than not, the Corporation has achieved this by unproblematically inserting them into the historical narratives of its period drama, or by seeking to neutralise their sexual difference by presenting sexual identity itself as obsolete.

These assimilationist representations and non-representations are potentially damaging to British non-heterosexual communities inasmuch as they ignore Rosemary Hennessy's "material realities that shape" individual lives.[91] *Torchwood*'s break from gay and lesbian identity politics in its presentation of human sexuality as fluid and unfixed is encouraging, in that it increases the visibility of those groups and individuals whose sexual behaviour and self-identification defy easy categorisation. Sexual identity

[89] Glen Creeber, "'Hideously White,'" p29..
[90] Katherine Cowan and Gill Valentine, *Tuned Out: The BBC's Portrayal of Lesbian and Gay People.* London: Stonewall, 1996.
[91] Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure,* p6.

categories, as Hennessy says, "restrict the power to act to the extent that they atomize human potential and social relationships," closing off "more comprehensive ways of thinking about sexual identification and desire" and limiting "our ability to understand the history of social relationships that identity formation depends on."[92] David Halperin asserts that, in the contemporary world,

> gay identity is [...] dangerous, even treacherous. It is an identity which must be ceaselessly resisted and rejected, precisely because it normalises and polices sexuality, because it functions to contain sexual and social difference, both in heteronormative culture at large and in lesbian and gay culture in particular. It is a politically catastrophic identity insofar as it enables society serenely to manage sexual diversity and in fact to stabilise and consolidate heterosexual identity itself (which would be a much more fluid, unstable and insecure identity without gay identity to shore it up).[93]

Essentialism, though, can also be a pragmatic necessity for individual queers. Even in the functionally multicultural Britain imagined by New Labour, gay identity and the outward signifiers thereof are often "threatened by denial, refusal, suppression and 'invisibilisation' [..,] continually treated as something shameful, deviant, pathological and out of place."[94] Queer theory may declare identity politics outmoded and restrictive, and shows like *Torchwood* may deem sexual identity irrelevant, but homophobic violence and discrimination in Britain continue unabated, in spite of the legislative alterations detailed in earlier chapters. A recent poll commissioned by Stonewall reports

---

[92] Ibid, pp219-20.
[93] David Halperin, 'Gay Identity after Foucault,' p18. Ed. Lucille Cairns, *Gay and Lesbian Cultures in France*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002.
[94] Ibid.

that one in five gay and lesbian Britons continue to experience bullying and harassment in the workplace on the basis of their sexuality, while a similar 2006 study indicates that some 65% of young LGB people have experienced homophobic bullying in educational environments.[95] A report conducted by Stonewall in association with the Home Office revealed in June 2008 that 20% of all gay men and lesbians living in the UK had been the target of anti-gay violence and abuse in the three years prior to the report's publication.[96] The high-profile murders of gay Londoners David Morley and Jody Dobrowski in 2005 illustrate the UK LGBT and queer communities' ongoing problems with gay-bashing and violently homophobic crime, while as Derek McGhee notes, institutional homophobia continues to affect the functioning of Britain's police force at all levels.[97] Contemporary Britain remains far from a queer utopia, and the adoption of a specifically gay identity by queer individuals and communities is often a strategic prerequisite within an environment virulently hostile to outward articulations of queerness.

Torchwood fails almost completely to engage with these "material realities." This lack of engagement is in part a result of its genre. Though set primarily in present-day Cardiff, the programme's narrative relies on Captain Jack, his team and ultimately the audience having knowledge of the queer-utopian future. The season one opening credits contain his warning that "the 21st century is when everything changes," a warning that very strongly suggests that this future is already determined, within the *Torchwood* universe.

---

[95] Ruth Hunt and Johan Jensen. *The School Report: The Experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools*, p3. London: Stonewall, 2007.
[96] Sam Dick. *Homophobic Hate Crime: The Gay British Crime Survey 2008*, p5. London: Stonewall, 2008.
[97] Derek McGhee, *Intolerant Britain? Hate, Citizenship and Difference*, p128. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005.

Fredric Jameson identifies science fiction's capacity for "apprehending the present as history," and the future as present, as one of the key features of the genre.[98] *Torchwood*, even as it focuses on contemporary events, presents the 21st century as a time distinctly past, and so is able to place some distance between the pansexual norms of the future, and the unwieldy identity politics of the present that is soon to be past. Failure to engage with both monolithic sexual identities and the occasionally harsh realities of contemporary queer life within the *Torchwood* narrative can be understood in part as a result of its presentation of the present as history. With the dissolution of sexual binaries an inevitable consequence of progress in its universe, and humanity's progression towards the future being very much a theme of the show, dwelling on the homophobia of the here-and-now could be regarded as unnecessary. A further argument could be made that, in a programme principally about aliens and monsters, time-travellers and covert government organisations working to prevent extraterrestrial invasions, marketed to science fiction audiences on the strength of the *Doctor Who* brand, the inclusion of overtly ideological or issues-based material focusing on the socio-political status of queers in contemporary Britain runs the risk of appearing incongruous. This argument lacks substance, however. As US shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997) have demonstrated, it is entirely possible to integrate some of the "material realities" of contemporary queer living into a science fiction/fantasy context.[99] Adherence to the conventions of the genre does not necessitate that these realities go unacknowledged.

---

[98] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, p288. New York: Verso, 2005.
[99] *Buffy*, which ran from 1997 to 2003, had one of its lead characters, Willow, come out as lesbian in the show's fourth season, and subsequently alluded to or dealt openly with the reactions she encountered as a

<u>"What is it with you homosexuals?": Gay men and comedy on the BBC</u>

Unlike its science fiction or period drama output, which until recently lacked much lesbian, gay or queer content, the BBC's comedy programming has for decades sought humour in (homo)sexual innuendo, camp and (mostly gay male) sexual stereotyping. Non-hetero sexuality has not been inserted into BBC comedy as it has into other programme formats, nor has BBC comedy been markedly appropriated for gay or lesbian purposes, since gay content has long existed within the genre as an unacknowledged but highly visible presence. Fey, suspiciously sensitive men and flamboyant, limp-wristed queens have populated British sitcoms and variety shows since the days of Wolfenden, with performers like Dick Emery (*The Dick Emery Show*, 1963-81), Larry Grayson (*Shut That Door!*, 1972-77; *The Generation Game*, 1971-2002) John Inman (*Are You Being Served?*) and the ubiquitous Kenneth Williams making regular appearances on UK television throughout the 1960s and 70s. In this period as Mark Simpson notes, homosexuality was "still indecent when considered as a concept" by mainstream audiences, the same audiences who found themselves entertained in the evenings by the antics of Grayson et al.[100] This led to the curiosity of those gay male comedians who "signalled" their homosexuality "as part of the act" continually alluding to their sexual identites through innuendo, but never going as far as to actually declare it.[101] In Simpson's words,

result of coming out, and then being out: awkwardness and surprise from friends (4:20,'The Yoko Factor'), hostility from strangers (6:9,'Smashed'), and so on.
[100] Mark Simpson, 'The Straight Men of Comedy,' p141. Ed. Stephen Wagg, *Because I Tell A Joke Or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference*. London: Routledge, 1998.
[101] Ibid, p140.

> This careful observance of connotation [...] and avoidance of denotation was naughty enough to make people laugh but didn't name the naughtiness, allowing the audience to disavow the idea that their star might actually relish performing the genital acts his demeanour signified.[102]

The recent mainstreaming of homosexuality within the UK has inevitably impacted on comedy, as on other genres. Homosexuality is now declaimed by comedians and characters alike. Performers are able to come out with relative ease, and gay and to a lesser extent lesbian comedy material may specifically address non-heterosexual identity and sexuality without recourse to connotation or innuendo. This increase in visibility comes at a cost, however. The gay comedy produced by the BBC exhibits the same assimilationist tendencies as its sci-fi and period programming, privileging the assimilated model of the "good homosexual" above the "dangerous queer" model described by Anna Marie Smith and outlined in previous chapters. Frequently it presents the latter model to its audiences as a target of justifiable ridicule.[103] Two BBC comedy shows broadcast between 1997 and 2007 illustrate this tendency.

Gimme Gimme Gimme, shown on BBC2 in 1999 and 2000 and on BBC1 in 2001, focused on the adventures of Tom (James Dreyfus), a gay actor, and Linda (Kathy Burke), a mostly-unemployed straight woman with whom he shares a suburban London flat. Like the American sitcom *Will and Grace* (1998-2006), *Gimme Gimme Gimme*

---

102 Ibid, p141.
103 Anna Marie Smith, 'The Imaginary Inclusion of the Assimilable 'Good Homosexual': The British New Right's Representations of Sexuality and Race,' p64. *Diacritics* 24:2/3, 1994.

explored and played for laughs the dynamics of the queer man/heterosexual woman relationship. However where *Will and Grace* deployed a cast of physically attractive, articulate and successful characters to this end, *Gimme Gimme Gimme* sought to wring comedy from an array of foul-mouthed Rabelaisian grotesques. The unattractive and sexually-voracious Linda, diagnosed in series three as suffering from "reverse body-dysmorphic disorder" (3.4, 'Trauma), typifies what Gilad Padva identifies as "unruly womanhood."[104] She is

> characterised not only by assertiveness, a loud and raw manner of speaking, ordering others about and controlling the dialogue, but also by her large size, her masculine […] appearance, and her domination (or attempted domination) of men.[105]

From her lascivious behaviour to her sexual malapropisms, too-tight clothes and bright ginger hair, eventually revealed as a wig (3.6, 'Decoy'), Linda is a caricature, a deliberate construction of ugliness designed to amuse audiences through her very hideousness. The same is true of her elderly neighbour Beryl (Rosalind Knight), an elderly ex-prostitute with a tendency to regale Tom and Linda with instructively bawdy tales from her life "on the game." Tom, meanwhile, is rendered comically grotesque through the outward markers of his sexual difference. He is skinny, overemotional and effeminate, a classic sissy-queen in the John Inman/Charles Hawtrey mould. His movements are exaggerated, his vowels over-pronounced. He runs from the perceived danger of larger, more intimidating men (1.5, 'Saturday Night Diva'; 2.3, 'Prison Visitor') and happily

---

[104] Gilad Padva, 'Unruly Womanness, Gender Dysphoria, and Anita Faleli's Iconography,' p25. *Feminist Media Studies* 6:1, 2006.
[105] Ibid.

abases himself before more masculine sexual partners, dressing up in women's underwear and allowing himself to be handcuffed to his living room wall ('Trauma'). He is narcissistic, bitchy, callous and self-absorbed, obsessed with his own (questionable) acting ability and imagined aesthetic appeal to the detriment of all other conversational topics. This is demonstrated particularly overtly in the series three episode 'Trauma,' which sees him dismissing the grief of a recently-widowed drama school friend in order to more fully talk about himself.

Far from according with what Anna Marie Smith identifies as the model of quiet, assimilable, straight-acting "good homosexual" propagated by British cultural conservatives throughout the 1990s, Tom embodies every imaginable heterosexist stereotype of alternately clown-like and waspish queer minstrelry.[106] His queerness is not contained or restrained, as the contemporary cultural politics of assimilation deem that it should be, but manifests in camp excess at which the show's audience was encouraged to laugh and poke fun. Kathleen Battles and Wendy Hilton-Morrow note that the sitcom format frequently "relies on familiar comedic conventions for addressing homosexuality," often "equating gayness with a lack of masculinity."[107] Even by the standards of the genre, though, Tom's campness is excessive, and excessively overt. Mark Simpson regards such excess in British comedy as indicative of "the strange contradiction of modern attitudes towards queerness."[108] He suggests that "while homosexuality has become more difficult to disavow as it has become more public, it has

---

[106] Anna Marie Smith, 'The Imaginary Inclusion of the Assimilable 'Good Homosexual.''
[107] Kathleen Battles and Wendy Hilton-Morrow, 'Gay Characters in Conventional Spaces: *Will and Grace* and the Situation Comedy Genre,' p89. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19:1, 2002.
[108] Mark Simpson, 'The Straight Men of Comedy,' p140.

also become less scary- and therefore less funny."[109] In contemporary British programming, non-hetero sexual innuendo and insinuation has lost its power to shock and elicit amusement. "Excess is required" to generate the necessary comedy. In its characterisation of Tom's queerness, as in its construction of Linda's unpalatably "unruly" femininity, *Gimme Gimme Gimme* demonstrates this excess admirably. Like the gay comedian Julian Clary as Simpson describes him, Tom is forced "to 'camp it up' […] to the point where he threatens to vanish in a puff of pink, fragranced, ironic smoke."[110]

The grotesque excesses of Tom's sexual difference establish him from the show's outset as a source of audience humour. His status as an object of ridicule is reinforced by the humiliatingly comic catastrophes that befall him. Over the course of the show's three-series run, he is rejected by a succession of prospective partners, including a buck-toothed and flatulent security guard (2.5, 'Glad To Be Gay?') and a man who physically assaults him after sex ('Saturday Night Diva'). He is erroneously outed as a transvestite by a national newspaper ('Trauma') and punched to the ground after becoming over-familiar with the soap star Patsy Palmer (2.1, 'Teacher's Pet'). He is both professionally and personally unsuccessful. In addition to his inability to achieve fame as an actor, it is revealed in series two that it has been some years since his last relationship ('Glad To Be Gay?'). Like Linda, he routinely violates the norms of socially acceptable behaviour, and receives punishment, in the form of derision, failure and physical retribution. As an unassimilated, un-assimilatable "dangerous queer," he flaunts his sexuality rather than

---

[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.

discreetly inhabiting it. He is, in Anna Marie Smith's words, "an incorrigible pervert who pursues the socio-political infection of the general populace at every opportunity."[111] Indeed, Linda accuses him throughout the series of being "obsessed" with his sexuality and with homosexuality more generally. As early as series one, she asks: "What is it with you homosexuals? Convinced that every other bloke on the planet is homosexual as well" ('Saturday Night Diva'). Here, as in *Gimme Gimme Gimme* more generally, the word "homosexual" is synonymous with dangerous queerness, rather than the normalised, socially-integrated gay identity popular in late 20th/early 21st century British culture and encouraged by the legislative actions of the Labour government detailed in Chapter 2. Tom in his excess represents just this dangerous queerness. Ron Becker observes that comedy as a genre "allows and enables one to recognise and then disavow through laughter."[112] In presenting the character of Tom to audiences as a figure of fun, the BBC exercised a subtle, highly nuanced form of social control over its audience. By caricaturing that queerness that falls beyond the boundaries of mainstream acceptability, the BBC rendered its potentially subversive elements ludicrous, and so allowed viewers to alleviate their anxieties about this danger by ridiculing it.

The theme of unruly and ridiculous queers obsessed with homosexuality resurfaced several years later in *Little Britain*, a BBC3 comedy sketch show later repeated on BBC2, and eventually promoted to prime-time BBC1. The show was an enormous hit for the Corporation, garnering in excess of 10 million viewers at the peak of its popularity in

---

[111] Anna Marie Smith, 'The Imaginary Inclusion of the Assimilable 'Good Homosexual," p64.
[112] Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight American*, p203. Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006.

late 2005 and spawning both Christmas and Comic Relief specials.[113] Purporting to comedically depict a cross-section of Britain, *Little Britain* was primarily a vehicle for the performances of comedians David Walliams and Matt Lucas, who demonstrated a penchant for *Gimme Gimme Gimme*-esque levels of excess by appearing as a variety of different characters, all of whom were in one way or another grotesque. Among the most popular and enduring characters were Vicky Pollard (played by Lucas), an unintelligible working-class teenager who was, as the journalist Johann Hari sardonically observes, "thick [...] and fat [...] and spotty" and "lived on benefits," and so made for "a hilarious joke"[114]; Sebastian Love (Walliams), a Prime Minister's aide sexually obsessed with his employer; obese, frequently naked socialite Bubbles de Vere (Lucas, in a fat suit); unconvincing transvestite Emily Howard (Walliams); and Daffyd Thomas (Lucas), the self-proclaimed "only gay" in the Welsh mining village of Llandewi Brefi.

The imagined humour of Daffyd's character derives from two places: his insistence that he is being discriminated against on the grounds of his sexuality, despite all evidence pointing to the contrary, and the look of him, his clothes and physicality. Matt Lucas is a short and noticeably overweight man. Daffyd, though, is squeezed in every episode into one or other kind of skimpy, tight-fitting outfit: a sailor suit, a PVC vest, leather hot pants, a studded biker cap. The incongruity of a fat man crammed into clothes designed for someone altogether more slender functions in itself as a source of comedy. Daffyd's appearance marks him out as ludicrous, a figure of fun. It also signifies his queerness, leather and plastic in particular having once been popular in certain gay male

---

[113] Figures courtesy of BARB.
[114] Johann Hari, 'Why I Hate Little Britain.' *Independent*, 22nd November 2005.

subcultures, and sailor-wear connoting the camp excesses of gay-friendly disco acts like The Village People. The way he looks is, in Hari's words, a "hilarious joke" in the context of *Little Britain.* Daffyd, though, is not only funny because he is queer. He also functions as a parody of "dangerous queerness," and particularly the "dangerous queers" and social activists who challenge the government-sanctioned idea that the contemporary, multicultural UK is free from homophobia. These the show characterises as "shrieking misery queens" who, as Hari puts it, "are so obsessed with being victims they obsessively see prejudice where there is none."[115] Daffyd is a self-described "out gay man" (series 1, episode 1) and imagines himself to be "the only gay in the village" (a statement that quickly became his catchphrase, and came to be repeated verbatim by *Little Britain* fans around the country). He is single and unemployed, frequently to be found lamenting his loneliness and isolation, and perceives his sexuality as the reason for his lack of social, romantic and professional success, attributing all three to homophobia on the part of potential employers and other village residents. The irony is that in reality Daffyd is not discriminated against at all. Llandewi Brefi is exceptionally gay friendly, populated by fully integrated gays and lesbians like Daffyd's friend Myfanwy and a succession of helpful elderly neighbours who offer to set him up with "a bit of cock" at every turn. The village teems with gay and lesbian social groups and events, including a gay book club, a gay sex club, a gay men's choir, a gay rambling society and a gay chapter of the Nation of Islam (1.3), while a great number of its residents proudly frequent its many cottages and glory holes. Even the vicar is gay, and happily coupled with the church's hot pants-wearing verger. Still Daffyd sees homophobia everywhere, refusing to believe that anyone but he could possibly be gay. More comically still, his victim status manifests

---

[115] Ibid.

itself at times as a kind of homophobia, as when he deems a gay man newly arrived in the village "not a gay [..,] just a little bit poofy" (1.1), finds a guest at Myfanwy's civil partnership reception "too pretty to be a lesbian" (2.5) or rejects his gay brother, whom be believes to be "going through a phase" (2.3).

In *Little Britain*'s Britain, no one gives a damn about homosexuality except a minority of homosexuals themselves, whose collective persecution complex leads them to complain endlessly about anti-gay bias that has ceased to exist in the modern world. Hari articulates the question the show poses to those troublesome, unassimilated queers who draw attention to the "material realities" of contemporary queer living thusly. "Why," he asks, "are you talking about the victims of homophobia when this is already a pro-gay paradise? What are you, the only gay in the village?"[116] *Torchwood*'s dismissal of the adoption of a specifically queer identity as irrelevant and divisive seems positively benign in comparison. In Lucas and Walliams' Britain, the queer who dares raise the spectre of homophobia is apt to be ridiculed for their audacity and scorned for their tunnel-vision. *The New Statesman*'s Andrew Billen terms *Little Britain* in general, and the Daffyd sketches in particular, "an advert for British values."[117] These are the "values" of a Labour government paradoxically given to promoting both cultural diversity and social assimilation and cohesion, and the individuals who voted it into office.[118] The show, he suggests, "[presented] a Britain peopled by kind and tolerant folk who smile upon the harmless eccentrics in their midsts," with the Daffyd sketches "representative

---

[116] Ibid.
[117] Andrew Billen, 'There's Nowt So Queer As Folk.' *New Statesman*, 8th December 2003.
[118] Ibid.

of the whole."[119] It purported to reveal "that Great Britain is so at ease with itself that it can now make jokes about gays and that gays, being so secure in their paradise, join in the laughter."[120]

No one sketch illustrates *Little Britain*'s positioning of Daffyd as an unassimilated and dangerous queer more aptly than one series 2 sequence that focuses on Myfanwy's civil partnership and her proposed adoption of a child with her partner, Rhiannon. When asked to co-sponsor the couple's adoption application, Daffyd replies in disgust, "You can't be bringing up kids! It's not right!" His response apes conservative opinions on the issue of gay adoption, such as those raised in response to the 2002 Adoption and Children Act, which officially sanctioned the adoption of children by same-sex couples. It also represents a more extreme, exaggerated variant of the reaction to pro-gay assimilationist legislation and proposals expressed by certain radical queer activists. These queers hold no interest in co-opting the trappings of monogamous, heterosexual marriage and its traditional child-rearing practices, but look instead to participating in what Shannon Winnubst calls "the radical reconfiguration of the family" through the rejection of such structures.[121] Daffyd in this sequence can again be read as "dangerous," a disruptive enemy of ostensibly gay-friendly assimilationist policy, and an irritating thorn in the side of assimilated queers like Rhiannon and Myfanwy. That he is again ridiculed and deemed a "stupid little poof" at the conclusion of the sketch is entirely consistent with *Little Britain*'s take on disruptive queerness, queerness kept firmly in its place within the show through the dispensation of mockery and derision.

---

[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Shannon Winnubst, *Queering Freedom*, p205. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Hari argues that Walliams and Lucas cannot be held entirely responsible for *Little Britain*'s characterisation of "dangerous" queerness. The immense popularity of its sketches indicated that audiences were partial to entertainment programming that ridiculed vulnerable and unassimilated minority groups: working-class teenagers, effeminate queers, cross-dressers, the overweight and the elderly. Lucas and Walliams were, he suggests, "simply responding to market forces" in providing viewers with characters and an ideological stance that were evidently well-liked.[122] The BBC, though, ostensibly exists above and beyond market forces. It is not a private company but a publicly owned corporation operating under a strong public service remit, funded by television licence fees and powered by government and royal assent. It purports to be a fair, impartial and socially-responsible broadcaster with a duty to provide appropriate programming for all sections of its culturally-diverse audience. As per the claims laid out in successive annual reports, the BBC as a public service provider functions not simply to entertain but to educate and inform the British public. It works in theory to engage intelligently and constructively with the cultural, political and economic issues which likely affect its viewers while avoiding the lowest-common-denominator programming logic employed by its commercial rivals. It is obliged to avoid the demonstration of any overt political agenda in its broadcast material, including those that seek as did the Blair government to stigmatise or scapegoat certain segments of the UK population. However, its endorsement of shows like *Little Britain* and *Gimme Gimme Gimme* ran counter to this obligation. Through this endorsement, the BBC appeared to demonstrate that, while "not formally a direct instrument of government,"

---

[122] Johann Hari, 'Why I Hate Little Britain.'

it often acted during the late 1990s and early 2000s as, in Georgina Born's words, "[a] watchdog of the state," reflecting government policy in its broadcasting decisions.

Such endorsement manifested most obviously in the scheduling practices both programmes provoked. Both *Gimme Gimme Gimme* and *Little Britain* first appeared on minority channels, those with smaller audience shares than BBC1: *Little Britain* on BBC3, *Gimme Gimme Gimme* on BBC2. After proving popular with viewers, though, both were upgraded to the BBC's mainstream channel, where a high overall audience share meant they were able to attract audiences in greater numbers.[123] Much greater numbers, in the case of *Little Britain*, whose BBC1 premiere in November 2005 drew 10.17 million viewers, an extremely high figure for a BBC comedy programme.[124] By exposing the shows to potentially much larger audiences, the Corporation demonstrated tacit approval of their content. The same is true of its response to *Torchwood*, upgraded from BBC3 to BBC2 after an enormously successful first season.[125] It is also arguably true of *Fingersmith*, which first appeared on BBC1 after *Tipping the Velvet*, another Victorian lesbian love story based on a Sarah Waters novel, garnered 5.12 million viewers on BBC2 two and a half years earlier.[126] The upgrading of all of these gay, lesbian and queer-themed programmes also contributed to a process of self-fashioning that has allowed the BBC to market itself as a champion of cultural diversity, despite a

---

[123] In the 1997 to 2007 years, BBC1's audience share fluctuated between (roughly) 30 and 22% of British television viewers, while BBC2 hovered between (roughly) 11.6 and 8.5% in the same period. (figures courtesy of BARB). In 2006, the BBC estimated BBC3's audience share to be around 1.7% of the overall audience (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/keyfacts/stories/bbcthree.shtml> [08/07/08]).
[124] Figures courtesy of BARB.
[125] At the time of writing, *Torchwood* series 3 is airing on BBC1 in a primetime timeslot, having been again upgraded, this time to unarguably mainstream entertainment status.
[126] Ibid.

broadcast content that suggests that it advocates such diversity only within certain restrictive parameters.

BBC America: narrative integration and the possibility of queer diversity in contemporary drama

Brand identity is not static, however. The identity advanced by the BBC is developing at the time of writing in response to the Corporation's further expansion into global export markets, and specifically the United States. These developments have impacted, and continue to impact on two areas of interest to this project, specifically the BBC's negotiation of its public service remit, and the nature of the LGBT and queer material produced for and broadcast on its terrestrial channels. The *type* of non-heterosexual content produced by the BBC is changing, arguably for the better. More and more frequently, assimilationist representations of "good homosexuals" and negative depictions of "dangerous queers" are eschewed in favour of complex non-heterosexual characterisations and narrative engagement with the "material realities" of gay, lesbian and queer existence in the present day. Similarly, gay, lesbian and queer themes are being steadily, unspectacularly integrated into shows professing to reveal something other than a *Queer as Folk*-esque slice of contemporary gay life. With specific reference to two shows shown on BBC1 between 2006 and 2007, *The State Within* (2006) and *Jekyll* (2007), the concluding section of this chapter addresses the reasons for this ongoing change to the nature of gay, lesbian and queer visibility on the BBC. In particular, it examines how the demands of the American market have caused the BBC to alter the ways in which it represents non-hetero sexuality within its programming.

Jeanette Steemers notes that the BBC is currently "Europe's largest exporter of programming."[127] On the basis of "the historical commonalities of language and culture and the anglophile sympathies of some in the US broadcasting community," it has successfully gained what she terms "preferential access" to the USA, "the largest and richest television market."[128] While as she observes, "British programmes account for a tiny proportion of US transmissions," exports to America have comprised, and continue to comprise a significantly large percentage of BBC overseas sales, overall.[129]

She also connects the BBC's increased push into global and specifically American markets since the mid 1990s to the specifications of the 1996 Royal Charter. The Charter insisted among other things that the BBC seek out ways to further generate its own revenue as a means of supplementing existing licence fee payments, in part through placing greater emphasis on exporting its programming overseas. It gave the BBC, as Steemers puts it, "a public duty to commercially exploit its assets": to profit by augmenting its presence, and so the BBC brand, in foreign territories, of which the US was by far the most lucrative.[130]

Since 1998, the BBC has serviced the American market primarily through two digital and satellite television channels, BBC World News and BBC America, the latter of which

---

[127] Jeanette Steemers, 'Balancing Culture and Commerce on the Global Stage: BBC Worldwide,' p231. Eds. Gregory Ferrell Lowe and Per Jauert, *Cultural Dilemmas in Public Service Broadcasting.* Göteborg, Sweden: Nordicom, 2005.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid

offers a range of drama, comedy and other entertainment programmes to a growing

body of US subscribers. Unlike other BBC enterprises (which together comprise what

might here be termed "BBC UK"), BBC America operates as an entirely profit-driven

concern, and is owned by BBC Worldwide, a commercial subsidiary of the Corporation

that deals exclusively in overseas exports. Its profits derive in large part from

subscription fees and advertising. Although responsible for generating profits for the

publicly owned BBC Corporation, it receives no money collected from British licence

fees, and is subject to only very limited public service broadcasting obligations.[131] The

stated aim of BBC Worldwide, and so of BBC America is, according to the Corporation's

2003/2004 Annual Report,

> To maximise the value of the BBC's content assets for the benefit of the licence payer, in
>
> order to reinvest its earnings into public service broadcasting and to extend the
>
> enjoyment of BBC programming among UK audiences and around the world.[132]

The success of BBC America, the BBC Corporation claims, impacts directly upon its UK

broadcasting, and allows for the production of more expensive and so quality

programming that accords with its public service goals. This same emphasis on bringing

quality television to audiences has informed BBC America's recent production decisions.

Between its launch in March 1998 and 2004, BBC America functioned exclusively as a

platform for BBC UK-produced content. Since 2004, though, it has expanded into the

---

[131] Steemers cites the greatest of BBC America's public service obligations as that outlined in the BBC
Charter and Agreement, which "stipulates that it must only engage in commercial activities consistent
with and supportive of the BBC's role as a public service broadcaster." ('Balancing Culture and Commerce
on the Global Stage,' p236).
[132] BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2003/2004, p68. London: BBC.

co-production of its own material, investing in original shows like *The State Within*, *Jekyll*, *Robin Hood* (2006) and *Mistresses* (2008-) as a means of securing them for broadcast in the US.

BBC America's brand identity hinges on the channel's provision of "cutting edge" entertainment programming to US audiences. The BBCAmerica.com website describes the channel as

> dedicated to bringing audiences a new generation of award-winning television featuring razor-sharp comedies, provocative dramas, life changing makeovers and news with a uniquely global perspective. BBC America's programming pushes the boundaries to deliver high quality, highly addictive and eminently watchable programming to viewers who demand more.[133]

In an US broadcast landscape still perceived to be dominated by what Kevin Glynn calls "tabloid culture," BBC America strategically positions itself as a broker of more highbrow programming.[134] Capitalising on the US "anglophile sympathies" to which Steemers refers and on the BBC's reputation for delivering what she notes as "prestige drama," the channel is aimed not primarily at mainstream American viewers, but at those who favour an "intelligent" alternative to mainstream fare.[135] In this respect it bears comparison with the subscription-only US channel Home Box Office (HBO), which subsists on subscription revenues and merchandise and video/DVD sales alone,

---

[133] 'BBC American: Frequently Asked Questions.' < http://www.bbcamerica.com/faq.jsp> [09/10/08].
[134] Kevin Glynn, *Tabloid Culture*: *Trash Taste, Popular Power and the Transformation of American Television.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.
[135] Jeanette Steemers, 'Balancing Culture and Commerce on the Global Stage,' p241.

and which has built a reputation on providing high-quality programming undisturbed by advertising and the demands of advertisers, in contrast with advertising-driven network channels like ABC and NBC which have garnered reputations as providers of the kind of "tabloid television" to which Glynn refers.[136] Steemers observes that, historically,

> the appeal of a complimentary distinctly British 'quality' alternative compared to the broader appeal of American entertainment and fiction has tended to restrict acceptance [of this alternative] to the margins- to lower rating niche outlets in the secondary cable and satellite sector rather than mainstream television.[137]

BBC America accords with this observation, in that it reaches only a minority of US viewers, and presents programming designed to appeal *to* a minority of viewers. The brand identity it has endeavoured to forge in recent years, though, demonstrates a knowing engagement with the attributes that British television programmes connote in the US cultural climate.

Prior to the establishment of BBC America, British and specifically BBC programming had tended to be sold to and subsequently broadcast on existing American channels, and especially on the Public Broadcasting Company (PBS), a non-profit broadcasting service with a reputation for delivering highbrow and factual material: dramas, documentaries, political discussion shows, and so on. *Masterpiece Theatre* (1971), a

---

[136] These reputations have been challenged in recent years however by the arrival on American network television of a raft of "quality" serial dramas and comedy-dramas, for example *The West Wing* (1999) and *Heroes* (2006) on NBC and *Desperate Housewives* (2004) and *Lost* (2004) on ABC.
[137] Ibid.

segment of PBS showcasting primarily costume dramas and literary adaptations, frequently distributed BBC costume drama, including the 1994 *Pride and Prejudice* and the 1994 *Middlemarch*. The proliferation of the genre on PBS, and so within the American broadcasting landscape more generally, served to consolidate the BBC's reputation as a provider of "quality," and more specifically "heritage" programming. The creation of BBC America however signalled a shift in the BBC's overseas marketing strategy through the development of a second strand of programming, distributed not by a US network but by one of the Corporation's own subsidiaries. This second strand might best be conceived of as cosmopolitan entertainment, the cosmopolitanism in this instance encompassing (as has been the case within so much of Channel 4's programming) a knowing acceptance of sexual difference.

As the self-description available on its website indicates, BBC America seeks to capitalise on its outsider status and the rarefied reputation of British television more generally. It deliberately markets itself at viewers who imagine themselves more sophisticated than the average American viewer, and so better equipped to enjoy the entertainments offered by "quality" UK shows.

Self-styled sophisticates are not the only viewers to benefit from BBC America's cultivation of an outsider persona through the promotion of ostensibly "alternative" programming. Gay and lesbian audiences in the US have also responded positively to the channel and its programming, and the channel has reciprocated by rewarding these audiences with a variety of gay, lesbian and queer-friendly shows, some acquired from UK terrestrial television, others produced in conjunction with BBC UK. Since 2006,

these have included programmes like *The State Within*, *Jekyll* and *Mistresses*, as well as *Sinchronicity*, the ITV drama *Bad Girls* (examined in detail in the next chapter) and *Torchwood*, which secured what were at the time the channel's highest recorded ratings of almost half a million viewers when it debuted in 2007.[138] *Little Britain* has also been a success on BBC America and in American more generally, to such an extent that an American spin-off, *Little Britain USA* (2008), has been developed for HBO. An article featured in the August 2007 digital edition of American queer magazine *Out* suggested that "BBC America seems to have its own homosexual agenda," identifying a policy of "entertainment integration" at work within the network and applauding it for "raising the quantity and quality of [its] gay content."[139] Ironically, given the BBC UK tendency to produce assimilationist representations of non-hetero sexuality in its programming, the article regards the cultural mainstreaming of homosexuality in Britain as a deciding factor in BBC America's promotion of gay, lesbian and queer material. It provides further indication that the UK is regarded, in certain American quarters, as an originator of programming which is both intelligent in its engagement with minority issues, and effortlessly cosmopolitan in outlook.

The impact of the BBC America brand's success, and of the network's recent ventures into television co-production on its UK parent company has been subtle but discernible, particularly with regard to the latter's terrestrial output. As the global, and especially American audience for British programming grows, so the BBC has begun to produce

[138] 'Torchwood Sets Record for BBC America.' AfterElton.com <http://www.afterelton.com/blog/dennis/Torchwood-sets-record-for-BBC-America?comment=26711> [11/07/08]

[139] Ed Hagan, 'Are You Being Served? Has Turning on Mainstream TV Become Part of Tuning into Our Identity?' *Out* magazine, August 2007 <http://out.com/detail.asp?id=22721> [11/07/08].

more programmes catering to the tastes of overseas viewers, programmes which have then surfaced on its terrestrial channels. The idea that a public service broadcaster might keep export markets in mind when designing the style and substance of its programming is not in itself new. Costume dramas and literary adaptations have as discussed long featured heavily in the BBC's campaign to market British television abroad, specifically through PBS, and as Steemers has observed have been extremely successful in the US, where the Anglophile sympathisers to whom she refers have tended in the past to construct Britishness on screen through costume drama, literary adaptation and other heritage genres.[140] American audience tastes, though, are changing even as British television producers develop to meet them. As discussed in the above paragraph, those US viewers inclined to seek out British programming for its imagined sophistication and cultural cachet now look to the UK to provide contemporary, "provocative" and above all cosmopolitan television, television which shows minority ethnic and sexual cultures integrated into culturally-diverse narrative worlds. Through BBC America, and more recently through its production collaborations *with* BBC America, the BBC continues to subtly tailor its material in the interests of appealing to US markets. As Steemers puts it, "in their more 'universal' appeal the programmes that result are quite different from the identifiably British historical or literary-based drama on which Britain's international success was historically based."[141]

The earlier sections of this chapter examine the extent to which the BBC has attempted between 1997 and 2007 to assimilate certain kinds of non-hetero sexualities into the

---

[140] Jeanette Steemers, 'Balancing Culture and Commerce on the Global Stage,' P240.
[141] Ibid, p245.

cultural mainstream, to normalise "good" homosexuality and to neutralise the threat posed by "dangerous" queerness within its programming. These attempts at assimilation have, as discussed, often been valorised for their supposed recognition of British cultural diversity, and justified with reference to the BBC's public service remit. As its self-description indicates, and its popularity among US gay and lesbian audiences seems to confirm, BBC America positions itself as a source of entertainments, including sexually diverse entertainments, which exist beyond the cultural mainstream. It regards itself as a purposeful provider of television that is at once mature and knowingly alternative, and as the very antithesis of mainstream "tabloid culture." Until recently, the identities established by the BBC and its commercial subsidiary conflicted. One purported to reflect the assimilation of diverse cultures into mainstream society through programming with (necessarily) mass appeal, while the other capitalised on the special-interest connotations of culturally-diverse television as a means of attracting audiences disillusioned with mainstream broadcasting. The conflict illustrated the broader clash between public service provision and commercial broadcasting, and was perhaps inevitable given the BBC's attempt to contain both modes of operation. While BBC America functioned purely as a showcase for existing British exports, such clashes had little effect on the BBC's production of new material for British television. Since BBC America has moved into co-production, however, it has become necessary for the BBC to reconfigure its identity a little, so as to better accommodate American audience requirements.

BBC America's cultivation of a brand identity that emphasises a cosmopolitan and cutting-edge programming agenda has necessitated that the programmes that it

finances demonstrate these same values. BBC UK increasingly looks to BBC America as well as its other commercial overseas networks as supplementary sources of income. It is therefore financially desirable for the BBC to green-light projects that are likely to appeal to BBC America's audiences, and that will in turn encourage the network to invest in their production. These projects go on to air on the BBC's terrestrial channels and, due to their culturally diverse content, meet the requirements of its public service remit, almost as a secondary consideration. Increasingly, the production of cosmopolitan and sexually diverse entertainment television is a mutually beneficial arrangement for the BBC and its subsidiary.

In content terms, this new push towards cosmopolitanism in BBC programming equates to an increase in different kinds of gay, lesbian and queer visibility. Specifically it equates to the presentation of non-heterosexual characters who conform to neither the "good homosexual" nor the "dangerous queer" archetypes. As the BBC begins to produce more material designed to appeal to global cosmopolitan rather than just mainstream British audiences, it begins also to shed those New Labour-inflected conceptions of national unity through cultural assimilation that influenced its gay, lesbian and queer programming in the earlier years of the Blair government. For global, and especially American viewers who look to the BBC to provide sophisticated broadcasting which they perceive to be lacking in their own national networks, assimilationist representations of British non-hetero sexuality are apt to appear both parochial and irrelevant. They are unlikely to resonate with anyone living outside of the British cultural climate. If the BBC wishes to attract cosmopolitan American audiences through its programming, it cannot risk alienating them by appearing to advocate a very British ideological position. The

risk posed by such advocacy, however subtly conveyed, has been outlined by the Blair government itself. As a report published by the Department of Media, Culture and Sport in 1999 suggested, the sometimes lacklustre performance of British television in overseas markets in the past has often been the result of drama that was "socio-political."[142]

Ironically, one of the first of the recent batch of BBC UK/ BBC America co-productions was itself an explicitly political drama. Set primarily in Washington D.C., *The State Within* featured a cast of well-known British and American actors including Jason Isaacs and *Cagney and Lacey* (CBS, 1982-88) star Sharon Gless. The show narrated the interconnecting stories of the British Ambassador to the United States, his aides and a host of other political figures embroiled in a multi-national, multi-government conspiracy so labyrinthine it, as one character observes, "makes Watergate look like a parking violation" (episode 4). In keeping with the trans-national nature of its production and financing, it explored issues pertinent to the global political climate, rather than simply to Britain and British culture, including international arms-dealing, Western intervention in central Asia and the American sponsorship of military regimes overseas. Its gay content represented a marked departure from that provided by earlier BBC programmes, offering multi-layered gay characterisations that eschewed all the obvious stereotypes and a complex male/male sexual and romantic relationship between two key characters that was both unapologetically rendered and pivotal to the overall narrative arc of the show.

---

[142] Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *Building a Global Audience: British Television in Overseas Markets- A Report by David Graham and Associates*, p24. London: DCMS, 1999.

Like *Jekyll*, which followed several months later, *The State Within* was sold to British BBC audiences as mainstream entertainment. Broadcast on BBC1 in a 9pm weekday timeslot, the show was conceived by BBC executives with the expectation of popularity in mind.[143] Like *Jekyll*, it bore the hallmarks of quality serial drama. Both were broadcast in six hour-long instalments of what Glen Creeber terms "long-form, episodic nature," and both were produced with what were for the BBC quite substantial budgets.[144] Fittingly, given the financial debt owed by both productions to BBC America and the need for both to appeal to certain sections of the American broadcasting market, both utilised what Robin Nelson has termed a "flexi-narrative" mode of storytelling, an approach found throughout the 1990s and 2000s in popular US serials like *24* (2001-), *The West Wing* (1999-2006) and *The Sopranos* (1999-2007).[145] Creeber defines the flexi-narrative as one that "harnesses the narrative complexity of soap opera for other forms of television genre," which "[weaves] together a number of interrelating, continuous, connecting and disconnecting storylines," and that as a result "better responds to and reveals the complexity, ambiguity and lack of closure that typifies the contemporary world."[146]

In the cases of *Jekyll* and *The State Within*, the flexi-narrative format allowed not only for non-heterosexual "character density," but also for the development of gay, lesbian

---

[143] Ultimately, however, the show's ratings were deemed disappointing by the BBC. Though it initially attracted more than 5 million viewers, figures dropped swiftly over the course of its run, and stood at less than 3 million by its conclusion (ratings courtesy of BARB).

[144] Glen Creeber, *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen*, p6. London: BFI, 2004.

[145] Robin Nelson, *TV Drama in Transition: Forms, Values and Cultural Change*. London: Macmillan, 1997.

[146] Glen Creeber, *Serial Drama*, pp4-5.

and queer themed plots within narratives which were not primarily *about* sexual identity, as many of the shows discussed earlier in this and earlier chapters have been.[147] *The State Within* was principally *about* government and corporate corruption and the engineering of a Central Asian war for economic ends, and happened to contain a gay relationship between two prominent male characters. This relationship only added further complexity to an already complex narrative, and happened in turn to contribute to the unravelling of the main corruption plot. *Jekyll* similarly was *about* the genetic reincarnation of Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr Henry Jekyll (James Nesbitt) and his destructive alter-ego Mr Hyde (also Nesbitt) in present day London (as Dr Tom Jackman), and their pursuit and eventual capture by a shadowy pharmaceutical company with a hidden agenda. It *happened* to feature a pair of lesbian private investigators in supporting roles which also happened to prove vital to Jackman and his family's escape. For neither of these programmes was non-hetero sexuality the point, or a thematic or narrative end in itself, as it was in for example *Tipping the Velvet*. Rather, non-hetero sexuality in both serves as just another means by which their multilayered narratives might represent the perceived realities of the contemporary world, and so play to the values of those cosmopolitan viewers likely to regard sexual difference as just another contemporary reality.

Creeber observes that a further attribute of the flexi-narrative is its soap opera-like capacity to engender "intimacy" and audience involvement in its development, which allows viewers to identify more strongly with individual characters and their

---

[147] Ibid, p5.

dilemmas.[148] In *The State Within* as in *Jekyll*, this intimacy allowed for the cultivation

over time of audience identification with their respective gay and lesbian characters. *The*

State Within offered two gay male characters, both prominently positioned in the

narrative: Nicholas Brocklehurst (Ben Daniels), an M16 operative and aide to the British

Ambassador in Washington, and his boyfriend Christopher Styles (Noam Jenkins), the

US Undersecretary of Defence.[149] Both men are three-dimensional figures, designed

every bit as complex and morally ambiguous as the other characters in the show, and

neither adhere to the stereotypical gay male models prevalent in British television. Both

exhibited traditionally 'masculine' qualities. They were shown as physically imposing,

strong and professionally competent, a far cry from the mincing queens of *Gimme*

Gimme Gimme or *Little Britain*. Both were dangerous, in the sense of being ethically

flexible and untrustworthy. Brocklehurst endangers lives by withholding information

pertinent to the upcoming war, Styles by conspiring to begin the war in the first place.

This dangerous quality, however, was shown as a function of their occupation and

status, rather than of their sexual difference. In order that they survive in the political

world, it is necessary that they practice deceit, and deploy threatening behaviour where

required to maintain a position of power. As Brocklehurst puts it, "it's [his] job" to be "a

duplicitous bastard" (episode 5). Neither men were characterised as particularly

likeable, but *The State Within* was a show populated not by likeable figures, but by

flawed and complicated ones. With the exception of Isaac's Ambassador and the

idealistic Foreign Office agent Jane Lavery (Eva Birthistle), all of its major characters

were "duplicitous bastards" in one way or another, but almost all were seen to possess

---

[148] Ibid, p9.
[149] *The State Within*'s BBC microsite, at http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/thestatewithin/ [15/07/08], offers detailed character profiles which expand on the information given in the show, as well as the usual cast interviews and episode guide.

some redeeming feature or humanising aspect. The warmongering Defense Secretary Lynne Warner (Gless) showed grief over a son killed in Afghanistan; the mercenary Colonel McIntyre (Nigel Bennett) is seen in one episode taking his young daughters to the park, and so on. Brocklehurst himself exhibits a previously unseen tenderness in the final episode, gently caressing Styles' cheek after he is shot. The flaws and complexities of *The State Within*'s characters, including its gay characters, were the very things which rendered the show compelling, the very means by which it achieved dramatic tension and sought to arouse the interest of audiences. In focusing on character "density," it also demonstrated that sexual difference can be entirely compatible with three-dimensional characterisation within television drama.

The depiction of Brocklehurst and Styles' relationship and the response of other characters to them as gay men allowed *The State Within* to engage with a "material reality," specifically the homophobia of the UK and US military and political arenas. In public spaces, particularly when both are accompanied by their immediate superiors, both men were shown to behave discreetly, professionally, allowing no hint of their personal relationship to surface. In the privacy of their homes, conversely, their interactions were shown initially as romantic and sexually charged, characterised by passionate kissing, terms of endearment, bed-sharing and the implication of (unseen) sex. So firmly is the professionalism of their relationship first established that, when they are first shown kissing (episode 1), the kiss and the revelation it carries about the sexualities of both men is surprising, if not entirely shocking. This public/private dichotomy is suggestive of closeted sexuality, or at the very least of an undisclosed relationship. However, the reactions of certain military figures to Styles in particular

227

gives some indication as to the reasons for this lack of disclosure, and strongly alludes to the pervasive homophobia still present in the real-world armed forces. Colonel McIntyre, an ex-high ranking officer in the British army, makes persistent and derogatory reference to Styles' sexuality even as he conspires with him, using the gay man's homosexuality as an excuse for calling his competence and masculinity into question. Styles is "a faggot," "a shirt-lifter," and the Colonel "[does not] take orders from bum-boys." His co-conspirator Gordon Adair (Ted Whittall), another military contractor, agrees (episodes 5, 6). The conflation of male homosexuality with a lack of masculinity, integrity and authority was a tactic frequently adopted by opponents of gays and lesbians serving in the UK armed forces, prior to the ban on such activity being lifted in 2000, and continues to be used in the US by more right-wing contributors to the ongoing 'gays in the military' debate. On both sides of the Atlantic, homophobic abuse directed at a gay man by a senior military official has an unavoidable cultural resonance. By positioning Brocklehurst and Styles as successful and resourceful brokers of military and political power, though, and by ultimately casting Brocklehurst in a semi-heroic light by allowing him to assist the Ambassador in uncovering the conspiracy, *The State Within* goes some way towards defusing the myth of the gay man as weak and incapable. In a British cultural climate that remains suspicious of openly gay men in high military and political office, and an American climate that forbids them from holding military office altogether, the idea that gay men can and do operate successfully within military and government spheres seems worth reiterating, even in television narratives.

Jekyll's lesbian characters are also smart and resourceful. Although given less screen time than Styles and Brocklehurst, they are equally integral to the narrative of their show. By dint of their profession, the private detective Miranda (Meera Syal) and her partner/assistant Min (Fenella Woolgar) are tasked with delivering some of the show's more expository dialogue to the other characters, elaborating on some of its more elaborate plot twists by referring to material gathered over the course of their investigation into Tom Jackman, and into Klein and Utterson, the company tracking him. At first glance, Min and Miranda appear to fit the assimilationist "good homosexual" model. They are settled, domestically-partnered and apparently monogamous. As episode 1 reveals, they drive expensive cars, own a large ivy-clad house in the Bedfordshire countryside, and are expecting a child together. Their partnership seems in almost every way an emulation of heterosexual marriage, rather than a threat to the institution or to the more restrictive notions of multiculturalism and cultural integration. While apparently "good," however, the characterisations of Min and Miranda were also quietly groundbreaking, representing a marked departure from earlier assimilationist representations of non-hetero sexuality and offering, like *The State Within*, a new and slightly more complex kind of non-heterosexual visibility.

The show's most obvious departure from the gay and lesbian visibility precedents established by earlier BBC programmes was its casting of a non-white woman, British Asian actor Syal, in the role of Miranda. The BBC has in the past been, to borrow Greg Dyke's phrase, "hideously white," marginalising the tastes and interests of minority ethnic audiences and seemingly reticent to introduce black and Asian characters into its programming in any real volume. This "hideous whiteness" and the lack of minority

ethnic visibility it suggests are particularly evident in its gay, lesbian and queer broadcasting. Of the many BBC shows mentioned in this chapter, only a handful feature minority ethnic characters in any kind of notable role, and none have so far cast a black or Asian actor as a lead,[150] although 2008's *Mistresses*, another BBC America co-production which explores LGB themes, includes a British Asian woman (Shelley Conn) among its four main characters. Gay, lesbian and queer minority ethnic characters have been scarce in BBC programming, even in recent years. The casting of Syal as Miranda is therefore significant in itself, as is the pairing of her character with a white actress (Woolgar) in the role of Min. If minority ethnic visibility is sparse within BBC productions, and non-heterosexual visibility sparser, the appearance of interracial same-sex couplings is so infrequent as to be worthy of mention when it occurs. *Jekyll*'s depiction of an apparently settled interracial same-sex couple expecting a child together, then, represents an unexpected and slightly startling development in the BBC's representation of queer, gay and lesbian lives and interests.

More startling still was *Jekyll*'s construction of Min and Miranda's lesbian relationship as preferable to majority of the show's heterosexual couplings, primarily Tom Jackman's marriage to his wife Claire (Gina Bellman). Min and Miranda are shown as loving and comfortable with one another, supportive and mutually protective, as in the first episode of the series, when Miranda ushers Min from the room at the first sign of danger posed by Jackman's transformation into Hyde. As *Jekyll*'s writer-producer Stephen Moffat

---

[150] *This Life* and *Sinchronicity* featured South Asian actors Ramon Tikaram and Navin Chowdhry in substantial roles, while *The Line of Beauty* cast black British actor Don Gilet as a romantic interest of the white British lead character, and *Torchwood* starred Japanese actor Naoko Mori as bisexual technician Toshiko. *Jekyll* and *The State Within* also featured black British actors Paterson Joseph and Lennie James in significant non-queer roles.

puts it, Miranda is "probably the most straightforwardly heroic" character in the show, her role that of the "very wise, very intelligent, very sort of morally alert one," and her relationship with Min "one of the spines running through the drama."[151] Together they are, in Moffat's words, "one of the happiest couples in the whole series."[152] Jackman's relationship with Claire conversely is fraught with tension. As the series opens, they are separated, having become estranged as a result of his condition and the emergence of Hyde. As the show progresses, it is revealed that it is his relationship with her which caused the initial transformation to occur, her presence acting as a trigger to the dormant Hyde gene. Where Min and Miranda are painted as what Malinda Lo calls "the show's decent, civilised center," Claire and Jackman's relationship is damaged and unstable, tainted by the constant presence of the Hyde persona.[153] For this reason can a case be made for *Jekyll*'s privileging of lesbianism and "the civilising influence of women" above heterosexual marriage and "bloodthirsty" masculinity.[154]

Conclusion

The changing nature of queer visibility in BBC programming is certainly attributable in part to the recent success of BBC America and the network's move into co-production territory. Shows like *Jekyll* and *The State Within*, as well as current series like *Mistresses* (still in production at the time of writing) indicate an overall shift within BBC broadcasting towards the construction of more complex and multi-faceted

---

[151] Malinda Lo, 'Jekyll and the Civilising Influence of Women' (containing interview with Stephen Moffat). *AfterEllen.com*, August 2007, <http://www.afterellen.com/TV/2007/8/jekyll?page=0%2C0> [01/07/08].
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.

representations of LGB and queer lives and relationships, away from simplified characterisations of "good homosexuals" and "dangerous queers" and programming which avoids any engagement with the material issues surrounding non-heterosexual identity in the contemporary world. The broader cultural and political determinants of this shift are explored throughout this project. BBC America's ongoing cultivation of a sophisticated and cosmopolitan brand identity however has played a significant role in bringing new, arguably better and certainly more varied kinds of on-screen sexual diversity to British audiences. It would not be unrealistic to imagine that the BBC America brand may influence gay, lesbian and queer programming yet to be produced, and so increase the breadth of non-heterosexual visibility on UK terrestrial television in the future.

That a commercial subsidiary and the demands of overseas markets have impacted upon the content of the BBC's domestic programming suggests that the Corporation's role as a public service broadcaster has been compromised. Such commercial activity might be regarded as incompatible with a public service remit, and it could be argued that to allow the tastes of foreign audiences to affect British terrestrial broadcasting is to fail to adequately represent those who subsidise the BBC through licence-fee payments. Central to the argument that the BBC's public service obligations have been eroded by its commercial endeavours is the idea that it currently meets the demands of British viewers, that it successfully represents "the UK, its regions, nations and communities." As the above case studies and the dearth of gay, lesbian and queer programming on its terrestrial channels in the years prior to 1997 demonstrate, the BBC has in the past failed almost altogether in its obligations to sexual minority audiences in the UK. Rarely

have non-heterosexual viewers enjoyed what Glen Creeber calls "[the] illusion of social solidarity" which successive Charters have determined that the BBC ought to create.[155] For such audiences, the current conflict between the BBC's commercial and public service activities could be perceived as irrelevant, since the Corporation has largely failed to represent sexual minority interests in its public service programming, and so failed to justify their licence fee investment. Like minority ethnic audiences, British gays, lesbians, bisexuals and queers have all too frequently been left out in the cold by the BBC's public service output.

Comparing Sky One to the BBC, Creeber notes that,

> Ironically, the British public service tradition- which prides itself on balance, impartiality and creating a sense of nationhood- seems less able to reflect the racial and cultural mix of its viewers than a system that has always been based almost entirely on commercial forces.[156]

The accuracy of the observation is borne out by analysis of BBC America, a commercial network which in less than three years of co-production has incited the BBC to a greater variety of sexual minority representations than ever it provided previously. In this respect, increased commercial activity and a concomitant increase in regard for audience tastes can be seen as having forced the BBC into a redefinition, albeit slight, of its own identity as a public service broadcaster. In many ways because of the success of BBC America, the Corporation has finally begun to fully meet the terms of its Charter in

---

[155] Glen Creeber, "'Hideously White,'" p30.
[156] Ibid, p32.

beginning to allow for non-heterosexual representations beyond the assimilated, the de-contextualised, the apolitical and the grotesque. For non-heterosexual audiences with an interest in having a broader scope of experiences "reflected" in their viewing, the pressure exerted on public service broadcasting by commercial producers is a change to be embraced.

Chapter 5. Competitive Urges: Queer Commercial Television, 1997-2007

Both Channel 4 and the BBC possess strong brand identities, forged in large part by their respective public service broadcasting obligations. As discussed in previous chapters, these brand identities have in turn impacted significantly on the gay, lesbian and queer-themed output of their digital and terrestrial channels. For Britain's commercial terrestrial broadcasters, at least in recent years, brand identity has been more nebulous and ill-defined. Neither the Independent Television network (ITV) nor Five (formerly Channel 5) are obliged to abide by such stringent public service remits as Channel 4 or the BBC. The 2003 Communications Act specifies that both commercial providers must provide "a high range of quality and diverse programming,"[1] and must also abide by more general Ofcom regulations governing fairness, accuracy, and harm and offence.[2] Its predecessor, the 1990 Broadcasting Act, ruled that nothing be broadcast on *any* UK channel that "offends against good taste and decency" or was "offensive to public feeling,"[3] and placed further regulation of the commercial channels and their broadcast material in the hands of the now-defunct Independent Television Commission. Even under the auspices of Ofcom and the ITC, though, the commercial channels were not obligated between 1997 and 2007 to fulfil any broader social, political or cultural purpose than the provision of inoffensive entertainment. No onus was placed upon them to inform and educate, nor were they obliged to adequately represent diverse cultures and underrepresented minority groups beyond the provision (at least in the case of ITV) of an agreed amount of news and religious programming. In the absence of

---

[1] *Communications Act 2003 (c.21)*. London: HMSO.
[2] 'The Ofcom Broadcasting Code.' <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv/ifi/codes/bcode/> [21/01/09].
[3] *Broadcasting Act 1990 (c.21)*. London: HMSO.

such obligations and imperatives, the commercial channels were free to concern themselves principally with profit, with attracting audience interest, generating substantial viewing figures and inducing advertisers to invest in airtime. This meant that they were free, within reason, to commission and broadcast almost any material they imagined might prove popular. It also meant that, in the absence of the functional imprint and structure provided by more rigorous public service obligations, the material when taken as a whole has tended to lack cohesion, and so the channels themselves tended to suffer an absence of any unifying theme, goal or identity. As John Ellis notes, the establishment of a body or canon of broadcast material which is distinctly and recognizably 'ITV' is made almost impossible by the breadth and diversity of programming offered by the regional subsidiaries of the channel in the fifty plus years it has been broadcasting.[4] Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock also note that franchise structure and regional programming and scheduling variations of the ITV network problematise the process of identifying a distinct ITV ideology.[5] Though the channel itself launched only in 1997, the ever-changing nature of Five's public profile and the erratic, broad stroke nature of its broadcast decisions has meant that its brand identity is equally difficult to ascertain.

This lack of brand identity has meant that, unlike Channel 4 and the myriad BBC channels, neither ITV nor Five have addressed themselves in the last decade to specific audiences via their programming. Channel 4 has accrued a reputation (through its public service remit and the programming that flourished under this remit) as a

---

[4] John Ellis, 'Importance, significance, cost and value: Is an ITV canon possible?' Eds. Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock, *ITV Cultures: Independent Television over Fifty Years*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005.
[5] Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock, 'Conclusions: ITV a Hybrid Subject,' p197, *ITV Cultures*.

provider of youth and minority-oriented programming, and as such is able to market itself effectively at the 16-34, ABC and cosmopolitan markets (see Chapter 3). The BBC through its various subsidiary channels has diversified sufficiently to appeal to a range of markets but has still maintained (at least to some extent) a brand identity suggestive of quality and integrity, which has allowed it to continue to position itself as a source of stimulating and potentially educative programming. This is in no small part because of its status as a national institution supported by a Royal Charter. The strong public service remits of both Channel 4 and the BBC have enabled them to successfully create audiences for their products. Five and ITV conversely have been unable to do so. Nor have they always wanted to. As ITV's 2003 Statement of Programme Commitments makes clear, the channel "aims to attract the widest possible audience" rather than specific demographics, and "has no specific remit to cater for specific minorities or to be innovative in form and content."[6]

In the absence of a distinct brand identity from which to draw conclusions about their gay, lesbian and queer content, both channels (and any gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer programming they transmitted) are perhaps best understood in the context of their relation to other terrestrial broadcasters, and their place within the broader British television landscape. Competition with other providers is an unavoidable consequence of broadcasting in a multi-channel environment, and commercial broadcasters for whom profit is king feel this most keenly. The sense of competition, the need to produce material that not only rivals but *outperforms* that of their competitors informs to a significant extent the production and commissioning decisions of British commercial

---

[6] ITV Statement of Programme Commitments 2003, p2.

broadcasters. For this reason, the following discussion breaks with the precedent set by the previous chapters. It examines the recent gay, lesbian and queer content of the two terrestrial commercial broadcasters, ITV and Five, in relation not to the brand identities of these broadcasters, but to their engagement with the programming policy and outlook of their terrestrial competitors.

It should be noted here that, despite the obvious impact of advertising revenues on ITV and Five's programme content, the specifics of terrestrial television advertising and sponsorship and will be discussed here (as in Chapter 3) only tangentially, in terms of its perceived impact on the programmes themselves. The sharp decline of television advertising revenues across the board since 2001, combined with the similarly sharp rise of digital and satellite channels, has meant that competition for the attentions of sponsors and advertisers has increased exponentially and that ITV and Five, which rely on sponsorship and advertising revenues for their survival, have been particularly affected. The changing nature of television advertising in the UK, however, is a sprawling and complicated issue, and indeed warrants a research project (or several) of its own- and so might, again, be better explored in depth elsewhere.

ITV

A brief examination of the history of ITV suggests the extent to which ITV's policy and programming have been informed by the BBC since its inception. The channel was established in 1955 as a consequence of the Television Act 1954, a piece of legislation pioneered by Conservatives as a means of breaking the BBC's monopoly on British

television broadcasting and encouraging competition within this area. This framed ITV from the outset as the first and earliest rival for BBC audiences.[7] Unlike the BBC, ITV was not a centralised organisation, but rather operated via a string of regional franchises with specific regionally-tailored news content, a concept which was intended as Andrew Crisell notes as a response to "what, in the hands of the BBC, was the excessive 'Londonization' of broadcasting."[8] It was anticipated by ITV's proponents that the regional structure of the channel would appeal to a broader range of viewers beyond the London area, and particularly in more northern areas of England.

Where, as discussed in the previous chapter, the BBC was obliged by the terms of its public service remit to provide programming that was both educative and informative, ITV was bound by slightly less stringent requirements. Governed initially by the Independent Television Authority (later the Independent Broadcasting Authority), a regulatory body that oversaw franchise ownership and operation as well as programme content, ITV was required at first to provide what Rob Turnock and Catherine Johnson identify as "a mixed programme schedule along the lines of public service broadcasting established by the BBC," including more highbrow arts and cultural material as well as news, sports and other light entertainment programming.[9] Before long though ITV had garnered a reputation, as Crisell, Bernard Sendall and others have suggested, as a purveyor of populist material, as "consisting of little other than quiz shows [..,] variety

---

[7] For a more detailed account of ITV's inception and its political context, see Bernard Sendall, *Independent Television in Britain.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982.
[8] Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, p84. London: Routledge, 1997.
[9] Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock, 'From Start-Up to Consolidation: Institutions, Regions and Regulations over the History of ITV,' p18. *ITV Cultures.*

spectaculars, soap operas and [imported] American film series."[10] In this respect it was, at least in terms of the programming which it delivered, a genuine alternative to the BBC, which tended (certainly in the 1950s) to prioritise its Reith inspired undertaking to inform and educate above the imperative to entertain its audience.[11] Of the construction of ITV as a competitor for BBC viewers, Crisell adds: "The term 'independent' [...] was a mischievously clever one. It damaged the BBC since if ITV was so called because it was independent of government control the implication was that the BBC was not."[12] If, by this logic, the BBC had long given its audience what it thought they needed, the role of ITV was to give them what they actually wanted, whatever that might be. The new channel had, as James Curran and Jean Seaton observe, no "deadweight of custom or dignity" to accommodate, and no self-imposed Reithian remit to fulfil.[13] Beyond according with the stipulations of the ITA, ITV had no obligation to perform any function beyond satisfying its audience, and so delivering new potential consumers to the advertisers who made possible its continued existence. This strategy proved successful, a victory for commercial television if not for the BBC. Within two years of its launch, ITV was attracting viewers in considerable numbers. As Bob Franklin puts it,

> ITV's programming targeted neglected 'mass tastes,' especially for entertainment,
> provided regional programmes which undermined the metropolitan flavour of much
> BBC output and delivered programmes (especially news) in a more informal style: the
> net result was to trigger a plummeting of BBC audience figures.[14]

---

[10] Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, p87.
[11] For more information on Reith and the formation of the BBC, see previous chapter.
[12] Ibid, p85.
[13] James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press, Broadcasting and New Media in Britain, Sixth Edition*, p170. London: Routledge, 2003.
[14] Ed. Bob Franklin, *British Television Policy: A Reader*, p8. London: Routledge, 2001.

An ideological opposition to "BBC" values, fuelled by this rivalry for viewers, has long informed ITV's broadcasting strategies. At least until the creation of Channel 4 in 1982 and the necessary break-up of the ITV/BBC television duopoly, ITV was "the other channel," a more frivolous and less high-minded alternative to the BBC (and later BBC2).[15] As the "other channel," it has specialised in the provision of mass appeal programming, but has also by necessity kept apace with policies and attitudes within the BBC as they have affected its programme content. As the previous chapter suggests, the BBC has changed a great deal in the last few decades, and ITV (ever the competitor) has changed in response. Even in the multi-channel broadcasting environment of the 1990s and 2000s, and even as both the BBC and Channel 4 assert ever-stronger brand identities as a means of staving off digital competitors, these two factors- ITV's "mass taste" tendencies and its role as the BBC's rival for audience affections- remain crucial to an understanding of ITV and its gay, lesbian and queer programme content.

It makes sense therefore to consider the following programme-driven case studies in relation to the kind of gay, lesbian and queer television produced by the BBC in the same timeframe, taking into account the effect of the development, scheduling and marketing practices of the one broadcaster upon those of the other. Between 1997 and 2007, BBC1 maintained an annual audience share of around 22-30%, BBC2 of around 8.5- 11.6%. ITV's figures fluctuated between around 16-33%, with a marked decline in the latter part

---

[15] The Pilkington committee, established in 1960 to investigate standards in British television broadcasting, took this assesment one step further. In a 1962 report detailing its findings, the committee strongly criticised both ITV and the ITA for what it perceived as the low-quality, sensationalist programming provided by the commercial network, while praising the BBC for maintaining high standards in the face of competition and recommending that the latter be rewarded with a second channel, BBC2.

of that period attributable in part to the rise of digital and satellite programming in the UK.[16] These numbers provide a basis for one hypothesis of this chapter. Between 1997 and 2007, ITV and the BBC were, despite the growing popularity of other channels, the main attractions for British audiences. In the absence of a strong public service remit (which might influence its programming policy on lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer material) ITV in particular was affected by the BBC's handling of sexual minority programme content, as well as (to a lesser extent) by the content of other UK terrestrial broadcasters.

It is worth noting here that, while the 1990s and 2000s saw significant increases in the popularity of non-terrestrial digital and satellite subscription channels, primarily those provided by Rupert Murdoch's British Sky Broadcasting Group, I have elected not to focus on Sky's programming output and brand identity in relation to those of ITV and Five. As of May 2006, Sky's channels commanded an 8.8% share of the overall UK television audience, positioning the organisation as a strong rival of ITV, Five and the other British commercial terrestrial channels in terms of advertising revenue and sponsorship.[17] However, while Sky's channels and in particular Sky One-notable for having showcased such big-name US series as *The Simpsons* (1989), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *24* (2001)- may certainly be regarded as competition for the commercial terrestrial channels, its success has been achieved largely through the acquisition and broadcast of American series, rather than through the production and broadcast of its original fiction programming. Its original fiction material moreover represents only a

---

[16] Figures courtesy of BARB.
[17] Ibid.

small percentage of its overall programming- and, bar one or two exceptions- contains

little in terms of LGBT and queer content.[18] It would therefore be misleading to suggest

that its negotiation of LGBT and queer visibility in its broadcasting impacted

significantly on ITV's in the Blair government years.

As discussed later in this chapter, the same argument can be applied equally to Five,

which offered virtually no LGBT or queer programming the 1997-2007 period and which

has achieved its greatest ratings successes with imported material. However, in order to

retain the terrestrial focus of the project, I analyse in some detail Five, its position on

sexual difference and the relationship of this position to the channel's overall brand

identity. Sky's brand identity and its negotiation of sexual difference however might be

explored more profitably elsewhere.

The following case studies examine the representation of non-hetero sexualities on ITV

between 1997 and 2007 in terms of their relationship to the gay, lesbian and queer

programming output of other terrestrial channels. The section on *Marple* (2004-)

discusses the impact of gay and lesbian BBC period drama on the sexual content of one

recent ITV detective drama, while the following section looks at the 2001 Russell T.

Davies' drama *Bob and Rose* in relation to Channel 4's *Queer as Folk* and the Davies

brand. The final section focuses on the lesbian-themed prison drama *Bad Girls*,

assessing stylistic and thematic changes in the show's narrative between the fourth and

---

[18] Sky One's teen witchcraft drama *Hex* (2004) featured a young lesbian character in a prominent secondary role, while the airline comedy-drama *Mile High* (2003) focused on the lives and relationships of a cabin crew and which presented several gay and bisexual male characters.

fifth series in the context ITV's attempts to establish a stronger brand identity and augment the mainstream appeal of its programming.

Marple: Queer Period Drama Redux

The ITV detective drama series *Marple*, adapted from the novels of Agatha Christie and still in production at the time of writing, demonstrates the tendency of ITV to respond to programming precedents set by the BBC, particularly in terms of gay, lesbian and queer issues. Like *Tipping the Velvet* and the other lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer-themed titles discussed in the previous chapter, *Marple* introduces LGB elements into a distinct historical setting, in this case 1950s rural England. Like them, it represents an attempt on the part of a major broadcaster to 'queer' two interrelated genres, the literary adaptation and the period drama. Tellingly, the series began two years *after* the success of *Tipping the Velvet* on BBC2, a series that (as the previous chapter suggests) paved the way for an array of gay and lesbian themed BBC period dramas. More than this, it was and continues to be shown on ITV in a Sunday evening timeslot, a timeslot often reserved by the BBC (as detailed in the previous chapter) for the broadcast of high profile costume dramas and literary adaptations.

Frequently the Sunday offerings of both the BBC and ITV have fallen within the category of what Charlotte Brunsdon terms "heritage television," a category "delineated partly through its representational domain, a certain image of England, partly through its dominant structure of feeling, an elegiac nostalgia, and partly through its production

values and export destiny, which offer the (tasteful) pleasures of money on screen."[19]

Previous Christie adaptations such as *Poirot* (1989-) and the BBC's own *Miss Marple* mysteries (1984-92) which ran for eight years in the 1980s and early 1990s, have conformed to the comfortable, popular and nostalgia saturated heritage television model. ITV's sexually diverse, morally ambiguous *Marple* however does not. Taking its lead from the *Tipping the Velvet*'s superimposition of twentieth and twenty first century thinking on sexual orientation and identity politics, *Marple* (and through it, ITV) attempt what the BBC managed to achieve in 2002, specifically a gay-friendly reinterpretation of what prior sexual offences legislation suggests was a distinctly homophobic past.

Marple in fact presents its audience with an interpretation of 1950s Britain in which same-sex desire is both present and largely accepted within small towns and rural village communities. This Britain is another kind of sexually diverse utopia, wherein homosexuality is both visible and so commonplace as to be barely worthy of comment. The show achieves this utopian vision by deviating in no small way from its well-known source material. The series one episode 'The Body in the Library,' for example, takes radical liberties with Christie's novel of the same name. The identity of one of the murderers is altered, to accommodate an unanticipated lesbian twist at the moment of denouement as the murdering duo are revealed, not as the scheming Josie Turner (Mary Stockley) and her husband Mark Gaskell, but as the remorseful Josie Turner and her female lover, Adelaide Jefferson (Tara Fitzgerald). Despite their crimes (two killings,

---

[19] Charlotte Brunsdon, 'The Structure of Anxiety: Recent British Television Crime Fiction,' pp202-3. Ed. Edward Buscombe, *British Television: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

and an attempt at a third), the women and their relationship are rendered fairly

sympathetically. Their first kiss is recreated in romantic, sepia tinged flashback which

serves to humanise them, to demonstrate their access to the full range of human

emotions, while their imprisonment (featured in neither the book nor the BBC

interpretation, for obvious reasons) is apparently distressing primarily because it

separates them from one another. They are not monsters, nor is their relationship

monstrous. The murders they commit are characterised as crimes of passion (of the kind

frequently committed by desperate heterosexuals) rather than the fruit of unnatural

desires or dispositions, a case of them doing, as Miss Marple (Geraldine McEwan) puts

it, "anything for love."

More sympathetic and less criminal is Mr Pye (John Sessions), who features in a later

episode, 'The Moving Finger.' Though a stereotypically lisping middle aged gay man, he

is nevertheless afforded within the ITV adaptation both a robust sexual appetite and a

(very modern) sense of security in his sexual identity entirely absent from the novel. The

contemporary Pye is a libidinous animal, happy to (very nearly openly) proposition

other men as they take tea with him in his sitting room. "What is your inclination?" he

asks one male character, after having revealed (again, in a line absent from the original

text but charged with meaning to cosmopolitan 21st century audiences) that he himself

"tend[s] more toward[s] the Greek." As his encounter with Miss Marple in the

churchyard makes clear, he carries no hint of shame about his own "inclinations." When

later in the episode he announces his intentions to live openly, to reject any "fox-in-

hole" secrecy and be 'who he is' irrespective of the judgement of others, he is defiant,

assertive, the very model of late twentieth/early twenty first century gay pride. Like Nan

246

in *Tipping the Velvet* (and in spite of a socio-political climate that deems his sexual orientation not only distasteful, but criminal), Mr Pye when roused to action (in another tweaking of Christie's original plotting) by the suicide of a closeted gay Colonel, very publicly comes out, to a roomful of his fellow villagers. In keeping with the show's utopian re-branding of rural 1950s life, all but one of the villagers are unfazed by the revelation. The sole dissenting voice belongs rather tellingly to the murderer, a coldly-calculating filicidal hypocrite, unrepresentative of the village as a whole, whose homophobia only underscores his unpleasantness. Here, as in such shows as *Queer as Folk* on Channel 4, the virtues of cosmopolianism and tolerance of sexual difference are prized highly. In *Marple* as in those shows, those characters that reject the cosmopolitan doctrine are cast in an irrefutably villainous light.

Unlike the murderous lesbians of 'The Body In The Library' though, and rather unlike this sexualised Mr Pye, the same sex couple who appear in the *Marple* episode 'A Murder Is Announced' are present in Christie's original story, as well as in the ITV adaptation. *Marple* only emphasises the physical dimensions of their relationship. The ITV *Marple*'s lovers Murgatroyd (Claire Skinner) and Hinchcliffe (Frances Barber) kiss, hold hands and are physically affectionate. They are evidently co-habiting partners, rather than mere friends or companions, a point emphasised by Hinchcliffe's simultaneously vengeful and grief stricken reaction to Murgatroyd's death, and Miss Marple's sympathetic response to her grief. At the story's close, the murderer having been unmasked, "Hinch" is comforted by those around her very much as a grieving widow might be, at one stage physically leaning on Miss Marple for support. That the women's relationship is every bit as valid as those of their heterosexual counterparts is

made abundantly clear within the show's narrative, as is the liberalism and generosity of spirit of this new incarnation of Miss Marple. Where the Marple of the Christie novels is characterised as a shrewd but somewhat judgemental and conservative old biddy, ITV's Marple is one of the series' most broad-minded and cosmopolitan characters. She is as she remarks in 'The Body in the Library' acutely aware of there being "a world beyond" the rural villages of southern England, a world richly diverse and replete with any number of interesting possibilities and couplings. She possesses the cosmopolitan knowledge identified by Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs, and specifically the knowledge of social and sexual difference. This knowledge better equips her to solve the crimes she encounters. In 'The Body in the Library,' for example, her awareness of the possibility of same-sex desires and relationships allows her to solve the case where detectives like Sir Colonel Melchett (Simon Callow), a senior policeman who had never before "come across such things," had failed. Since Miss Marple serves across the series as a whole both as the chief protagonist and point of identification for the viewer, what Gerard Genette terms the "focaliser" of the narrative, her embrace of sexual diversity is especially significant.[20] By understanding without question or moral judgement the sexual identities of Adelaide Jefferson and Josie Turner, Mr Pye and Hinchcliffe and Murgatroyd, she signals to the audience that it is acceptable, indeed desirable to do so.

Issued by *Marple* producers Granada in 2004, the pre-release press pack for 'The Body in the Library' first positioned the show's gay and lesbian content (and its handling thereof) as spectacle, a contemporary attraction in an unexpected period and genre

---

[20] Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited,* trans. Jane E. Lewin**.** Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988.

setting and as such, an idiosyncrasy worthy of audience interest. Though "absolutely faithful to the *spirit* [italics mine] of the books," the press pack states, the series "[throws] in some surprises which will keep diehard fans on their toes," its producers having "found a new approach to the material which [they hoped would] appeal to a new audience." [21] It mentions specifically neither sex nor sexuality. However, even cursory textual analysis of the series suggests that the "surprises" and surprise deviations from Christie's source material will encompass sexual difference, and more specifically the introduction of gay and lesbian content into narratives in which little or none was previously. Noticeably, the statement echoes the sentiment expressed by both the BBC and Andrew Davies prior to *Tipping the Velvet*'s release in 2002. The injection of gay and lesbian sexuality (and implicitly, twenty first century sexual mores) into period programming, it suggests, would be just the thing to attract new audiences to what might otherwise be considered a dull and moribund genre.

A New Vocabulary: Opposite Sex Desire and Bob and Rose

The six part ITV drama *Bob and Rose* (2001) saw ITV influenced not by the BBC, but by Channel 4, and more specifically the earlier success of *Queer as Folk*. Susan Boyd-Bowman has observed that, in British television, creative power is imagined to lie with the writer and to a lesser extent the producer, rather than the director as is frequently perceived to be the case with cinema. Glen Creeber among others has attributed to television drama's roots in theatre, a medium that has historically prized the authorial

---

[21] ITV Press Pack, 'The Body in the Library'

agency of the dramatist.[22] Therefore as Boyd-Bowman notes "the name attached to a British program in the case of TV fiction is generally the screenwriter's,"[23] while "it is the producer's name which holds pride of place as the last name of the end credits," imprinting the television text with his or her authorship.[24] Like *Queer as Folk*, *Bob and Rose* was both written *and* produced by Russell T. Davies, a fact acknowledged and discussed at length in the pre-release press coverage of the latter show. Like *Queer as Folk*, the show was set in and around Manchester's gay community, and specifically the gay village of Canal Street. In this respect, despite sharing several key production crew members (and more than one cast member) with the earlier programme, *Bob and Rose* bore Davies' authorial brand, and was recognisably a Russell T. Davies production. In borrowing the reputation accrued since *Queer as Folk* by the Davies brand, a reputation that, as discussed in earlier chapters, hinted at the possibility of controversy as well as quality, ITV opened itself up to accusations of magpie-ism, of having co-opted a well known and lucrative brand (Davies) and concept (gay sexuality) from a rival broadcaster and modified them for mainstream audiences for its own commercial ends. However, such accusations would have given only an incomplete picture of the content of the show. While *Bob and Rose* accords with the ITV pattern of borrowing successful concepts from other networks as a means of remaining relevant and attractive to viewers in a highly competitive television landscape, it also developed and to a degree departed from some of the more fundamental ideological underpinnings of the earlier show. If *Queer as Folk* was an explicit example of *gay* television, *Bob and Rose* might

---

[22] Glen Creeber, *Dennis Potter: Between Two Worlds: A Critical Assessment.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998.
[23] Susan Boyd-Bowman, 'Television Authorship in France: Le Réalisateur,' p51. Eds. Robert J. Thompson and Gary Burns, *Making Television: Authorship and the Production Process.* Westport, CT: Prager, 1990.
[24] Susan Boyd-Bowman, 'Television Authorship in France,' p61.

better be termed *queer*, its queerness manifesting most overtly in its narrative

deployment of opposite sex, rather than same sex desire. At the heart of *Bob and Rose*

was an ostensibly *straight* romance, specifically the development of a sexual and

romantic relationship between a gay man, Bob (Alan Davies) and a heterosexual

woman, Rose (Lesley Sharp).

The term "queer," Eve Sedgwick has suggested, can refer not only to gay, lesbian and

bisexual identities and behaviours, but also to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps,

overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the

constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be*

made) to signify monolithically."[25] While the terms "gay" and "lesbian"

> still present themselves (however delusively) as objective, empirical categories governed
>
> by empirical rules of evidence (however contested), [the term] "Queer" seems to hinge
>
> much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular, performative
>
> acts of experimental self-perception and filiation.[26]

For Sedgwick, queerness is "about desires and identifications that move across gender

lines, including the desires of men for women and of women for men."[27] These desires

and identifications are "directed, not at reconfirming the self-evidence and

"naturalness" of heterosexual identity and desire, but rather at rendering those

culturally central, apparently monolithic constructions newly accessible to analysis and

---

[25] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, p8. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993.
[26] Ibid, p9.
[27] Ibid.

interrogation."[28] To be queer is to seek through thought and deed to denaturalise and destabilise any and all binary and "monolithic" conceptions of (particularly gender and sexual) identity, including the "identitarian" positioning of homosexuality as an ontological category, and same sex desire as an immutable condition to which the individual gay or lesbian is permanently in thrall.

On these terms, *Bob and Rose*'s central conceit, that of a gay man falling in love with a woman, is queer because it tackles and ultimately undermines the identitarian characterisation of sexual identity and the resulting behaviour as fixed and unchangeable. It is queer because, according to all the (identitarian) cultural and political constructions of sexuality which prevail in contemporary Britain, openly gay men don't fall in love with women, being through biological imperative or social conditioning simply unable to do so. However, in the show's universe, they are shown to occasionally do just that.

Opportunities for comparison with *Queer as Folk* presented themselves continually throughout the series. Both shows were, as mentioned above, culturally and geographically rooted in similar territory, Canal Street, and (mostly cosmopolitan) Manchester more generally. As in *Queer as Folk*, occupation of this territory functioned in *Bob and Rose* as a marker of its gay lead character's sexual identity. Bob, whom the script frequently places in and around the village's bars and nightclubs, is identifiably Canal Street and so identifiably gay, in contrast to the heterosexual Rose, who frequents the bars and nightclubs of Deansgate, a less gay-friendly area of the city which more

---

[28] Ibid.

than one character terms "the straight end" of town. The show's first episode begins by situating Bob and Rose in their respective social/cultural environments, and in doing so strongly (and more than likely consciously) evokes early scenes from *Queer as Folk*, as Bob cruises a crowded Canal Street pub for other men before picking up a stranger and heading back to his place for sex.[29] Later nightclub sequences set in Babylon (a real world gay male venue visited by characters in both Davies' shows) also call to mind the earlier series, with Bob's sexual appraisal of men from a dancefloor balcony echoing Vince's similar assessment of the club's clientele from a similar balcony in episode 3 of *Queer as Folk*.

Queer as Folk as discussed in earlier chapters provided a somewhat rigid and restrictive representation of ostensibly "queer" sexual identity, through a cast of young, white, groomed gay male characters who slept exclusively with equally young, equally white and equally groomed men just like them. *Bob and Rose* in contrast offered a far more expansive suggestion of what the term "queer" might encompass. It depicts a gay-identified man who is able to form a relationship with a woman while continuing to articulate an attraction to men, and it suggests (echoing Eve Sedgwick) that, rather than deferring to the established sexual categories "gay" and "straight", we would do better to seek what Davies calls "a vocabulary that will fit the sheer complexity of ordinary men and women" when discussing sexual identity and behaviour.[30] Even after committing to a relationship with Rose, Bob deems himself gay-"not bisexual, gay"- and so forces those around him to re-conceptualise what such an identity might encompass. In the third

---

[29] Detailed analysis of *Queer as Folk*, encompassing the relevance of its Canal Street setting is provided in earlier chapters of this project.
[30] Russell T. Davies, 'A Rose By Any Other Name,' *Observer* 2nd September 2001.

episode, this self-identification rings hollow, and seems to fit uneasily with his sexual behaviour, particularly when he claims while out on a date with Rose, "I'm absolutely gay… I swear to you, I was born gay, I'm gay now, I'll die gay, and I'll have a gay gravestone." Later in the series, though, he is able to express more clearly what this kind of "gay" (or, in Sedgwick's terms, queer) identity might mean. Following an epiphany during a night out in Babylon, he comes to realize that "there are no rules" where attraction is concerned, only self-imposed constraints. This realization in turn induces him to reveal his new relationship to his parents by way of a coming-out speech in which he states,

> I've got a girlfriend. And it's not like… there are still men, I only fancy men. I fancy men and *her*. Except there aren't any men, 'cause I'm trying to be faithful. […] I haven't *grown up*, I'm not *better*. I'm still the same.

Bob's caveat, that he "[hasn't] *grown up*, [isn't] *better*," is significant, further emphasizing both the show's queer agenda and Davies' intent to secure "a new vocabulary" of desire. As he makes explicit, Bob has not *become* heterosexual or even bisexual through his involvement with Rose. He is still attracted to men, almost exclusively attracted to men, but also feels able to acknowledge his attraction to one individual woman. In doing so, he opens up the "monolithic structure" of male homosexuality to the very "analysis and interrogation" to which Sedgwick refers. Through *Bob and Rose*, Davies was able to introduce genuinely queer ideas and characterisations into prime-time British broadcasting, eschewing both the shallow

identitarianism of *Queer as Folk* and the more apolitical "pansexual" utopianism of the later *Torchwood*.

Why, then, did ITV eschew the assimilationist characterisations of gay and lesbian identity that informed the BBC's (and to a lesser extent, Channel 4's) programming policy to create a show like *Bob and Rose*? The answer again lies with the BBC, or rather with the perception of contemporary BBC programming held by David Liddiment, ITV Director of Channels between 1997 and 2002. As Liddiment saw it, the "commercialisation of public service broadcasting" exemplified by the BBC's move towards more commercially oriented programming was increasingly forcing his network to compete by eschewing risk taking in its broadcasting decisions in favour of a "safety-first" approach. [31] This approach was defined, he suggested, by a willingness to finance and commission shows on the basis of their potential to attract large audiences, rather than their perceived creative merit.[32] "A more commercially focused BBC," he lamented in 2001, "reduces the scope for range and creative ambition by ITV," and "the end result is more formula product and a reduction in creative opportunity all round," leading inevitably to the "eventual squeezing out of less mainstream programming."[33] The BBC, he felt, had a responsibility as a publicly funded institution to lead the way for other broadcasters in terms of 'quality' programming, but was failing to live up to that responsibility, and the effect on ITV was profound. The perceived falling standards of the BBC nurtured a defeatist retreat from innovation and 'quality' in ITV programming, inculcating in ITV executives the impression that the creation of any such innovation

---

[31] David Liddiment, 'The James MacTaggart Lecture 2001: The Soul of British Television,' p239. Ed. Bob Franklin, *Television Policy: The MacTaggart Lectures.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid, p244.

would result in "very severe penalties."[34] These penalties, of course, equated to lower ratings and the commensurate difficulties they would likely bring.

Liddiment however rejected the inevitability of a decline in 'quality,' at least on his network. As a June 2000 *Guardian* article on (the then-forthcoming) *Bob and Rose* suggests, his aim was not to give in to the pressures of commercialism, but to invest instead in programming which might appeal to new audiences, in particular the youth audiences so beloved of Channel 4.[35] His tenure as Director of Channels was marked by numerous instances of experimentation and risk in programming and scheduling decision-making, all in pursuit of 'quality.' For example, the cutting-edge but relatively unpopular dramas *Bob Martin* (2000) and the award-winning *Bloody Sunday* (2002) both appeared, and the initially-unpopular series *Cold Feet* (1997-2003) was resurrected under his jurisdiction. All were broadcast alongside successful projects like *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* (1998-), *Pop Idol* (2001-03) and *Bad Girls* (1999-2006), a show discussed at length in the following paragraphs. *Bob and Rose* in this respect represented a further attempt on Liddiment's part to achieve 'quality' through experimentation and risk-taking. It constituted one "part of a strategy [...] to woo lucrative youth viewers" and "push at the boundaries of mainstream television," the risk in this instance lying in the show's rejection of binary and identitiarian thinking regarding the essential, unchanging nature of sexual desire and identity.[36]

From homonormativity to excess: *Bad Girls* and the end of innovation

---

[34] Ibid, p240.
[35] 'ITV to screen gay drama during peak time,' *Guardian*, 20/06/00.
[36] Ibid.

Despite the wealth of publicity that accompanied its release, *Bob and Rose* was not a commercial hit, generating disappointing ratings for ITV at the time of its broadcast.[37] Conversely, *Bad Girls*, the network's lesbian themed drama series set principally in a women's prison, proved to be one of Liddiment's most successful (and enduring) creative experiments. Like Michael Jackson at Channel 4, Liddiment took steps to significantly redefine his channel's brand identity. Examination of *Bad Girls* serves to illustrate the extent to which his policy of innovation affected broadcast and production decisions during his time as Director of ITV, and the many ways in which his departure from the post in 2002 signalled the network's descent into the very creative and commercial torpor that he feared.

Devised in the late 1990s by independent producers Shed, the show began with what co-creators (and self-professed "proselytizing feminists"[38]) Maureen Chadwick and Ann McManus have identified as an explicit "political agenda."[39] This encompassed an imperative to foreground the "issues" facing women in the British criminal justice system, among them drug addiction, sexual abuse, violence, institutional discrimination and material deprivation.[40] Over an eight series-long run encompassing two Christmas specials and a heavily publicised crossover episode with another successful Shed-produced drama, *Footballers' Wives* (2002-06), *Bad Girls* was consistently popular with ITV audiences, and regularly attracted between 7 and 8 million viewers per episode

---

[37] Viewing figures courtesy of BARB.
[38] LeeAnn Kreigh, 'Interview with *Bad Girls* creator Maureen Chadwick' at AfterEllen.com, 4th March 2007 <http://www.afterellen.com/people/2007/3/chadwick?page=0%2C0> [20/10/2008].
[39] Interview with Maureen Chadwick and Ann McManus at Badgirls.co.uk <http://www.badgirls.co.uk/library/int_other/int_ac1.html> [21/10/2008].
[40] Ibid.

to its 9pm timeslot.[41] Fans and critics lauded early episodes of the show for

uncompromising, mostly realistic depiction of prison life and presentations of lesbian

relationships and identities. This was borne out by the diversity of the lesbian

experiences portrayed, and by the sustained focus on the development of a relationship

between two central female characters. From the fourth series onwards though, *Bad

Girls* took as Didi Herman notes, "rather different turns."[42] Plots became more

implausible and labyrinthine, characters more grotesque and increasingly disposed

towards acts of pantomime villainy and fairytale heroism. Emphasis was placed less on

the achievement of any accurate representation of incarceration, and more on the

production of spectacle and a thematic and stylistic excess that bordered on, and

occasionally descended into self-parody. "Issues" remained-series 5 for example

highlighted the issue of breast cancer through an established character's diagnosis and

treatment- but were generally packaged alongside other, more unlikely narrative twists.

These included a fatal explosion in series 4, a devastating outbreak of Legionnaire's

Disease in series 8, and an improbable number of successful prison breaks. By the final

Christmas special, broadcast in 2006, the show's producers had dispensed altogether

with the pretence of seriousness, and opted instead to deliver a jailhouse take on

Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* replete with ghosts, gore and unanticipated

dismemberment. The result, as one broadsheet reviewer commented, was "totally loopy"

but a far cry from the feminist polemics of the earlier series.[43]

---

[41] Figures courtesy of BARB.
[42] Didi Herman, '*Bad Girls* Changed My Life: Homonormativity in a Women's Prison Drama,' p157. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20:2, 2003.
[43] 'Last Night's TV.' *Guardian* 20th December 2005.

This departure from purported realism had consequences for the show's gay and lesbian content, which itself became increasingly erratic and sensationalist. Established lesbian characters were written out and substituted by more caricatured figures both gay and straight, and the defining same-sex relationships of the earlier series were replaced by less-developed romantic subplots and increasingly explicit girl-on-girl action that seemed designed to generate controversy. *Bad Girls'* progression from feminist drama that, in Herman's words, "constructs lesbian sexuality as normative" and "disrupts the [women in prison] genre significantly" to soap opera-like comedy-melodrama strongly reflected the change in ethos in the 1999 to 2006 period. Specifically, this meant the ideological shift away from David Liddiment's quest to keep the channel competitive and relevant through the provision of 'quality' drama, and towards a return to the "mass-channel," "populist" approach that characterised ITV in its earlier years- an approach which had proved successful in attracting audiences before the BBC itself succumbed to commercial pressures.[44]

The early series (that is, series 1-3) were notable for their avoidance of sensationalism in the presentation of same-sex relationships, and in the lesbian and bisexual characterisations they provided. Of the ensemble and predominantly female cast of characters, five were explicitly marked as lesbian through their exclusive involvement with other women. These were: androgynous "lifer" Nikki Wade (Mandana Jones) imprisoned for defending her girlfriend against a would-be rapist; boyish poisoner Shaz Wylie (Lindsey Fawcett); "Mad" Tessa Spall (Helen Schlesinger), HIV-positive and perennially confined to the prison's psychiatric wing; butch Glaswegian gang-member

---

[44] Didi Herman, '*Bad Girls* Changed My Life,' p143.

Al McKenzie (Pauline Campbell), and biracial Denny Blood (Alicia Eyo), ferociously tattooed arsonist and the only minority-ethnic queer character to appear in the show until its seventh year of broadcast. Other notable lesbian and bisexual characters within the show's universe included the sexually-indiscriminate sociopath Shell Dockley (Debra Stephenson) and ostensibly heterosexual Wing Governor Helen Stewart (Simone Lahbib), whose illicit affair with Nikki Wade comprised one of major narrative arcs of *Bad Girls*' early years. Unsurprisingly given the prison setting and the potential for dramatic tension inherent in such a backdrop, each character was often shown embroiled in some complicated subplot or other. Denny, for example, helps to develop an in-house phone sex service in series 2 ('Babes Behind Bars'). Tessa holds Governor Karen Betts (Claire King) to ransom with a contaminated needle ('Mistaken Identity'), while Nikki incites a riot in protest at the ill-treatment of a Nigerian prisoner ('Battle Lines'), and so on. The matter of their sexual difference though was rarely relied upon as a plot device or means of generating intrigue or suspense. Nor as Herman observes was it presented to audiences as a "reveal," a shocking and unexpected twist. Helen notwithstanding, all of the characters were "out" from the beginning.[45] In each case, their sexual difference was one of the less interesting things about them. Each was consistently defined by attributes other than sexual orientation: Denny by her difficult childhood and educational impediments, Shaz by her immaturity, Nikki by her pride and ethics, Shell by her cruelty and sociopathy, Tessa by her "madness." Nor were their relationships depicted as significantly sensational, shocking or worthy of controversy. In comparison to the show's heterosexual relationships, principally between corrupt prison officer Jim Fenner (Jack Ellis) and a succession of incarcerated women, including Shell,

---

[45] Ibid, p146.

its lesbian pairings were benign, if not mundane. As a couple, Denny and Shaz are mischievous and likeable, if child-like, while Nikki and Helen are characterised as, as Jenni Millbank observes, "star-crossed lovers," the "Juliet and Juliet" to whom Nikki refers in an early series 1 episode ('Playing With Fire').[46] Fenner and his partners conversely are "involved in sleazy sexploitation" contingent on their lack of power, and his willingness to abuse the authority his position affords him.[47] In the early *Bad Girls* universe, mainstream television-narrative logic was suspended, with lesbian sexuality functioning as the romantic standard and straight sex the shocking, aberrant alternative. I wish to return to this point later in the section with reference to specific episodes from the early series.

Didi Herman brands early *Bad Girls* "homonormative."[48] Unlike "other mainstream television products that may have lesbian or gay characters within a prevailing context of heteronormativity," she suggests, the show "[represented] lesbian sexuality as normal, desirable and possible"[49] by "[taking] lesbianism for granted."[50] *Bad Girls'* prevailing context was, at least to begin with, fundamentally lesbian. It consistently privileged a lesbian perspective on (dramatised) incarceration above a heterosexual equivalent of the same. Nowhere was this more apparent than in its characterisation of Nikki Wade, perhaps the most prominent protagonist of the early series and a "desirable" cipher for audiences both straight and gay.

---

[46] Jenni Millbank, 'It's About *This*: Lesbians, Prisons, Desire,' p172. *Social and Legal Studies* 13:2, 2004.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Herman, '*Bad Girls* Changed My Life.'
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid, p143.

Nikki was designed from the show's inception not only as a principle character, but as a mouthpiece for the feminist-justice ideals of the *Bad Girls* creators. Chadwick and McManus describe her as representative of "the political heart and soul of the show," a compassionate moral compass for the viewer who served among other things to draw attention to the flaws and inequalities of the penal system.[51] Herman and Millbank both regard her as an example of what Sally Munt calls the "heroic" lesbian, an "aspirational figure"[52] who functions as both "icon of struggle" and "lesbian success story" for other queer women,[53] who "battle[s] with a symbolic Law" and wins to triumph over literal and metaphorical heteropatriarchal oppression.[54] Certainly, the development of her character over the initial three series accords with the heroic model. Whether protesting the treatment of foreign inmates, rescuing cellmate Monica (Jane Lowe) from an overdose ('Love Hurts') or defending fellow prisoner Yvonne (Linda Henry) from a razorblade attack in the showers ('Rough Justice'), Nikki is consistently shown as strong, brave, warrior-like, a protector of those unable to protect themselves against those seeking to abuse their vulnerability. The crime that led to her imprisonment, the defence of her partner against a sexually predatory police detective, is itself easily read as a rebellion against the implementation of the unjust Law which Munt identifies. Likewise her successful appeal and release at the end of series 3 only confirmed the lesbian-positive ideological position underpinning early *Bad Girls* in its suggestion that, through the actions of heroic non-heterosexual women, the symbolic Law can be overcome. Though frequently hot-tempered and given to favouring uncompromising

---

[51] 'Series 3 Q & A with Ann McManus and Maureen Chadwick at BadGirls.co.uk, <http://www.badgirls.co.uk/library/int_other/int_ac1.html> [30/10/2008]
[52] Sally Munt, *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space*, p8. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
[53] Ibid, p1.
[54] Ibid, p13.

idealism above pragmatism, as demonstrated by among other things her instigation of the protest/riot, she was unfailingly *good*, perhaps the most un-problematically good character in the series. By positioning the character to occupy such a role, Chadwick, McManus and the other producers of the show urged their audiences to empathise with her, to see and feel injustice as she did. In this way, they encouraged these audiences to view the world of *Bad Girls* from a lesbian-heroic standpoint, and so to examine its homonormative universe from an uncompromisingly lesbian perspective.

The show's central relationship, between Nikki and Helen, was also characterised as desirable, if not outright heroic in comparison to the heterosexual equivalents on offer. This further confirmed the creators' apparent endorsement of lesbianism as a superior alternative to destructive, unfulfilling heterosexuality. In its early years at least, *Bad Girls* succeeded in delineating heterosexuality as dangerous, much as non-heterosexual sexualities had been and continues to be shown to be in other shows and across other media. Close analysis of one episode of the series in particular illustrates this tendency well.

Broadcast in 2000, the series 2 finale 'Oh What a Night!' concentrated principally on Nikki's escape from prison and her subsequent visit to Helen's home. Multiple subplots juxtaposed the lesbian relationship with various heterosexual ones. These focused variously on the Shell Dockley/Jim Fenner affair, which culminated in a violent cliff-hanger that served to introduce the first episode of the third series, inmate Yvonne Atkins' abandonment by her adulterous gangster husband Charlie (Ivan Kaye), and the wedding anniversary party of officer Sylvia Hollamby (Helen Fraser), conveniently held

263

within the prison walls. In every instance, the content and delivery of the episode privileged the lesbian Helen/Nikki interactions above others. Their initial sex scene in Helen's flat for example is accompanied by familiar stylistic tropes that lend a sense of romance to the encounter: gentle lighting, soft music, close-up facial shots suggestive of the emotional intensity of the moment. The post-sex sequence, which shows the two women naked in bed, holding each other and reflecting on how "amazing" the experience has been for them both, invokes similar features to similar effect. Wide-angle shots keep both characters in frame for the early part of the scene, positioning them as equals and their relationship as one of equality, despite the power disparity implied by their roles as jailor and prisoner. Again the lighting is dim, the background music soft, the clean white bed-sheets draped around them rather unsubtly pointing to the purity and unspoilt innocence of their love. No matter that just minutes earlier in the episode, the script saw Nikki banging aggressively on her girlfriend's front door, demanding to be let in and threatening to "smash the bloody window" if denied. No matter that the affair itself was both unethical and every bit as illegal as Fenner's involvement with Shell.[55] In the homonormative early years of *Bad Girls*, the valorisation of lesbian sex and sexuality took precedence above even narrative coherence, and the Nikki/Helen relationship was therefore necessarily characterised as tender, reciprocally nurturing and (according to the show's internal logic) morally "right."

The straight pairings explored in the episode were, as in the early series more generally, almost exclusively "wrong" in one way or another. Released inmate Crystal's (Sharon

---

[55] Helen herself admits this in an earlier episode. Herman and Millbank regard her knowledge of and guilt about this ethical transgression as one of the ways in which she (and her relationship) are set apart from the thoughtless transgressions committed by heterosexual characters.

Duncan-Brewster) reunion with boyfriend Josh (Nathan Constance) in the closing moments of the series (again accompanied by soft, upbeat music) suggested the possibility of a happy ending for the pair. It should be noted however that even this was achieved only through the intervention of a lesbian character, Denny. The other heterosexual relationships were painted less kindly, and suffered less fortunate fates. Charlie's (off-screen) infidelity and desertion of Yvonne, who was imprisoned for attempting to assassinate one his business rivals, points to the unreliability and casual cruelty of men and the likelihood that those women who stand by them will be rewarded with heartbreak and neglect. Indeed, Yvonne is last seen in the episode alone, drinking by herself in a darkened cell and angrily berating a photograph of her husband for the indiscretions of the real thing. Sylvia's interactions with Bobby (Geoffrey Hutchings), her husband of thirty years, only confirm the series' dim view of opposite-sex marriage. Bobby, the audience learns, is a cold and negligent partner, who flirts with Karen at his own anniversary party, chastises Sylvia for her "foolish" behaviour after her drink is spiked with Ecstasy and threatens to lock her out of their home if she fails to accompany him there. Sylvia in turn is (or has become) a bitter, disillusioned and sexually-frustrated wife. Their marriage, in stark contrast to Nikki and Helen's relationship, is characterised by a distinct absence of passion. They have not had sex for some time. As Sylvia rather unsympathetically puts it, "there's always some excuse [...] Too tired, sore back [...] I think there's something wrong in the waterworks department, if you know what I mean." By the end of the party, Sylvia is also alone, abandoned by Bobby and crying hysterically on the floor.

It was through Jim Fenner though that the show's producers most explicitly demonstrated their disdain for heterosexuality. As the most prominent male character in the early years of the show, Fenner best articulated the show's position on gender relations, or rather its producers' belief in the destructive nature of heterosexual masculinity and the redeeming power of female/female relationships. He was, as so many characters described him throughout the series, an abject "bastard," misogynous, homophobic, Machiavellian and sexually abusive, a natural enemy of women and of feminist ideals. As such, he threw the relative merits of female characters around him, and of the possibility of lesbianism into sharp relief. In the *Bad Girls* universe, Fenner more than any other male character was emblematic of masculinity as a concept. So unpleasant was his character that lesbianism appeared desirable by comparison, to audiences as well as to female prisoners within the show. As Herman puts it, "the centrality of the Jim Fenner character in *BG* play[ed] a crucial role in "othering" heterosexuality."[56]

Other episodes in the early series would see him engage in rape, extortion and violence. In 'Oh What a Night!' though, Fenner's misdeeds were mostly restricted to his manipulative seduction of Karen, and his ill-judged instigation of sex with Shell Dockley. Since the Fenner/Shell relationship serves as the heterosexual foil to the Nikki/Helen plot throughout the early series, it is appropriate that the scenes of the former couple's sexual encounter appear in the episode alongside those of the latter. This again allowed the producers to overtly juxtapose the romance of lesbianism with the horrors of heterosexuality. Where sex between Helen and Nikki takes place in the

---

[56] Didi Herman, '*Bad Girls* Changed My Life,' p154

warmth and comfort of a clean and spacious apartment, Fenner approaches Shell in her

dirty, cramped and unlit cell from which there is no possibility of escape. Where Nikki

and Helen are often filmed in a way that allows them both to occupy the frame, Fenner

and Shell's encounter begins with a standard shot/reverse-shot that emphasises the

height, weight and by extension power disparities between them. Shell appears small

and weak, Fenner large and menacing. Most tellingly, where sex between Nikki and

Helen concludes with (implied) orgasm and cuddling, Shell brings her encounter with

Fenner to a violent close (in episode 1 of the third series, which continues the series 2

cliffhanger) by thrusting a broken bottle into his stomach. As with the Yvonne/Charlie

and Sylvia/Bobby relationships, the suggestion could not be clearer that lesbian sex is

apt to end in pleasure, heterosexual sex in pain.

Herman's 2003 article concludes that, "*BG*'s challenge, for example to dominant gay

market images, combined with its explicit feminist politics and narrative subversions,

may be unsustainable under conditions of prevailing capitalist heteronormativity."[57]

This speculation proved prophetic. From the fourth series onwards, *Bad Girls*

abandoned its hard-line feminist, homonormative position in favour of the kind of camp

excess described in the opening paragraphs of this section. By series 4, the Helen/Nikki

storyline had been concluded. Nikki was released, Helen resigned her position and the

two were able to begin a life together, away from the prison. Shell had escaped, with

Denny in tow, and only Shaz and Al were left to represent the LGB experience within the

Bad Girls universe. The once-sizeable lesbian element of the show was significantly

depleted. In part because of the market conditions that Herman identifies, little effort

---

[57] Ibid, p156.

was made to re-establish this element, with the show instead deferring to a more standard heteronormative ideological position that presented lesbian sexualities as spectacle, rather than as positive alternatives to heterosexuality.

The change in direction from 2002 onwards may well have been attributable in part to the departure of David Liddiment (also in 2002) and to the installation of a replacement, Nigel Pickard, in the Director of Programmes post. It might well also have been due to the overall commercial failure of Liddiment's approach to competing with the BBC and other broadcasters, and to keeping ITV relevant in the multi-channel market. Although ITV had in 2001 scored higher annual ratings than BBC1 for the first time in forty years, the previous year saw ITV's overall audience share fall by almost 2% from 31.2% to 29.3%, as it competed not only with the BBC but with other digital and satellite television providers.[58] The same year, the network's advertising revenues, its sole source of income, dropped significantly, a decline that continued into the next year and beyond. These factors, combined with the substantial losses incurred by the failure of the network subsidiary channel ONdigital (later ITV Digital) meant that the network could no longer afford to take risks with its programming and commissioning decisions. Shed in turn could not afford to finance the production of a show which risked rejection by the network on which it had found both a home and a lucrative 9pm timeslot. Series 1-3 of *Bad Girls* had proven tremendously successful with viewers, but overall audience losses to the BBC caused ITV to rethink their broadcasting strategy and brand identity, necessitating Liddiment's resignation and an end to his policy of "innovation" in ITV programming.

---

[58] Figures courtesy of BARB.

The show's shift from homonormativity to heteronormativity and from quasi-feminist drama to commercially-packaged entertainment product was signalled most obviously by the comparative dearth of prominent lesbian and bisexual characters in the later episodes. The departure of Nikki Wade created a void within the series, an absence of valorised sexual difference that no new "heroic" lesbian character arrived to fill, at least until the introduction of angry, assertive lifer Pat Kerrigan at the end of series 7. A diverse array of lesbian and bisexual characters continued to feature in the show's fabric. These included: Kerrigan and her girlfriend, heroin addict Sheena; white-collar criminals Cassie Tyler (Kellie Bright) and Roisin Connor (Siobhan McCarthy) in series 4; wrongly-convicted Kris Yates (Jennifer Ness) and prison officer Selena Geeson (Charlotte Lucas) in series 5 and 6; South Asian trans-woman Arun (Rebecca Hazlewood) in series 7, and black, butch prison officer Mandy Goodhew (Angela Bruce) in series 8. These however were often relegated to subsidiary roles, with their relationships generally appearing as subplots rather than primary narrative concerns, in stark contrast to the Helen/Nikki story, which dominated much of the early series. When these relationships *were* shown, they were often utilised as devices for the creation of shock and/or controversy. Kris and Selena's relationship for example was conveyed via the "reveal" of their kissing passionately in Kris' cell upon her arrival at the prison. Prior to the kiss and the narrative "twist" that it represented, audiences were privy to knowledge neither of their romantic involvement, nor of their sexual identities.

Their sexual difference was, to paraphrase Herman, a "secret waiting to be revealed," and revealed for the purposes of generating maximum dramatic impact.[59]

The later non-heterosexual characters were also more transient. Unlike Helen and Nikki, whose story ran for three consecutive series, and Denny, who remained with the show until series 5, none of the later lesbian and bisexual characters featured for more than a series and a half before being written out.

This decrease in the prominence of lesbian sexuality and relationships correlated with a marked increase in the number and diversity of heterosexual relationships presented in the show. Where previously lesbian relationships had been contrasted primarily with the exploitative heterosexual exploits of Jim Fenner, and secondarily with the rather sweeter Crystal/Josh romance, later series of *Bad Girls* also fore-grounded a host of other male/female sexual relationships, some destructive and some more pleasant experiences for the characters involved. Mentally unstable officer Di Barker (Tracey Wilkinson) married wife-beater Barry Pearce (Andrew Lancel), and prisoner Barbara Hunt (Isabelle Amyes) became involved with prison chaplain Henry Mills (Michael Elwyn) in series 4. Officer Colin Hedges (Tristan Sturrock) fell for Yvonne Atkins in series 5; and later Wing Governor Frances Myers (Eva Pope) in series 6. Officer Donny Kimber (Sid Owen) dated prisoner Janine Nebeski (Nicola Stapleton), and Wing Governor Lou Stokes (Amanda Donohoe) began an affair wth Prison Medical Officer Rowan Dunlap (Colin Salmon) in series 8. Herman asserts that, in the early series, *Bad Girls'* "strategies of estrangement around hetero- and bisexualities [were] linked to its

---

[59] Didi Herman, '*Bad Girls* Changed My Life,' p146.

construction of a lesbian heroic."[60] The absence of this heroic in the later series, coupled with the presence of more positive representations of heterosexuality and opposite-sex relationships all contributed to the show's overall retreat from these strategies of estrangement. They represented overall an end to the de-familiarisation and periodic demonisation of heterosexuality that characterised the show in its early years.[61]

The heteronormative excess that supplanted homonormativity in the later years lent all aspects of the show including its remaining non-heterosexual characters and relationships a transparently ratings-seeking shock-factor above a sense of verisimilitude. This manifested both in the narrative of the show, via unlikely plot twists, and in its visual aesthetic. Close examination of a later episode, the series 6 debut, demonstrates the ways in which both this sensationalism and the accompanying shift away from homonormativity discussed above had come to dominate and define the show by its sixth year.

The extended episode 6.1 was first screened in April 2004 and ran for an hour and a half, including advertising breaks, rather than the usual hour. It featured two main plot strands, both of which utilised unexpected twists, shocking revelations and stylistic allusions to other, spectacle-driven genres to generate and sustain tension. The first, and most relevant to this discussion concerned Jim Fenner's murder of Yvonne Atkins (committed at the very end of the fifth series), Kris Yates' attempt to escape the prison, and her subsequent discovery of Atkins' decomposing corpse in an underground

---

[60] Ibid, p154.
[61] The introduction of a sexually predatory gay male character, Governor Neil Grayling, in series 4 did not help matters here.

hanging cell. This plot strand played out very much like a B-movie horror film, and drew

on many of the visual and aural tropes associated with such productions.[62] The strand

began as it ended at the finish of the episode, with a series of slow tracking shots

through the empty, darkened corridors of the prison accompanied by chilling sound

effects, notably the eerie whistling of wind. These shots culminated in a horrifying,

rapidly-edited round of close-up shots: bloody fingernails scraping down a concrete

wall, a hand stretched desperately out into the darkness, and a terrified figure trapped

within the confined space of the hanging cell, screaming. In the beginning of the episode

as at its end, this sequence concluded with a surprising jump-cut, what David Scott

Diffrient calls a "shock cut" signalling "the intrusion of new narrative information as

well as a temporal and/or spatial gap in a story's unfolding."[63] In this case the scene cut

to an extreme close-up of Fenner's frightened eyes, then to a wider shot of his sweating

torso, then a wider-still shot of his whole body as it sprung awake from the guilt-induced

nightmare that was the preceding sequence. This opening gambit represented the first of

the many shock-tactics employed by the show's producers, both within the episode and

in the later series as a whole.

Yates' prison break served as the catalyst for the discovery of Atkins' body, and

underscored the extent to which both her character and her relationship with Geeson

---

[62] Multiple text-based definitions of the horror genre have been offered by scholars of the genre almost all of which commit what Andrew Tudor terms "the fallacy of generic concreteness" (Andrew Tudor, 'Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre,' p456. *Cultural Studies* 11:3, 1997). In the context of this discussion, for the purposes of clarity, I defer to the broader definitions provided by Jason Mittell and others, which focus on the uses of extra-textual factors such as marketing and promotional strategies in building audiences and so creating and sustaining the idea of genres (see discussion in earlier BBC chapter).

[63] David Scott Diffrient, 'A Film is Being Beaten: Notes on the Shock Cut and the Material Violence of Horror,' p54. Ed. Steffen Hantke, *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear*. Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2004.

failed to live up to the heroic precedents established by the Nikki Wade character, and by the Helen/Nikki dynamic. The latter's relationship as Jenni Millbank observes was notable for its strong ethical dimension, for Nikki and Helen's preoccupation with "doing the right thing," for their frequent acknowledgement of the transgressive nature of their affair and for the guilt that both (but particularly Helen, the authority figure) felt at having broken the rules of the prison.[64] The Kris/Selena relationship conversely was characterised by a total absence of guilt, despite being equally transgressive. Selena, as the later episodes of series 5 reveal, applied for a job in the prison service specifically to be with Kris, with little disregard for the illegality of the action. "Doing the right thing" was not a consideration, only the fulfilment of their own desires. This is illustrated most clearly by Helen and Selena's respective attitudes to their partners' escape. Where Helen, confronted with Nikki's plan to leave the country on a false passport, persuades her to return to prison and eventually drives her there herself ('Back From The Brink'), Selena actively encourages Kris to flee, securing a copy of the building's blueprints and then a set of keys so as to enable her to better do so. They are not "heroes," just flawed and somewhat calculating individuals, not so devious and apt to manipulate the system as Fenner, but not "star-crossed lovers" of the Helen and Nikki mould, either.[65]

Given this lack of heroism, it is perhaps unsurprising that their relationship like the other lesbian relationships of the later series was exploited primarily as a means of introducing further sensationalised narrative twists, rather than sensitively explored as an end in itself, as was the Nikki/Helen affair. In the opening episode of series 6,

---

[64] Jenni Millbank, 'It's About *This*,' p172.
[65] Ibid.

certainly, it functioned solely to bring to light Atkins' murder, and so to lay the groundwork for subsequent plot developments. Specifically these included Fenner's guilt and his deteriorating mental state, best witnessed in 6.3, in which he strips naked on the prison landing, and 6.4, in which he is sectioned after beating and urinating over Yates in a fit of mania. The Kris/Selena relationship and the subsequent discovery of the body also allowed the episode to capitalise on the popularity of another television genre, the contemporary forensic crime drama, and to compete specifically with then-popular BBC programming of that genre.

Stylistically as well as thematically, the examination by detectives later in the episode of the discovered corpse and the hanging cell crime scene made knowing reference to successful crime reconstruction and investigation-driven franchises. It recalled among other shows *CSI: Crime Scene Investigations* (CBS, 2000-) and *Law and Order* (NBC, 1990-) as well as ITV series like *Prime Suspect* (1991-2006) and *Trial and Retribution* (1997-). The inclusion of such crime drama staple props as fingerprint-dusting kits, plastic shoe-coverings, yellow crime-scene tape and magnifying glass-enhanced close-up shots of possible clues all helped allude to the sequence's debt to the genre, but it was the camera's handling of the decomposing body which most explicitly articulated it. Though in previous and subsequent episodes of *Bad Girls*, the bodies of dead characters were filmed in colour and no differently than the still-living bodies of other characters, the various parts of Atkins' horrifically rotting corpse-mangled fingers, torn nails, sprawled leg, mottled face-were delivered to audiences in a more mediated form, as a series of black and white crime scene photographs. These were punctuated by intermittent camera-bulb flashes, and ostensibly originated from the lens of a police

274

photographer crouched a short distance from the body, who had been captured in a preceding shot. Deborah Jermyn has argued that the appearance of dead bodies whether in the flesh or via "photographic evidence" often functions in British drama as "a signifier of realism," connoting both 'the real world' and the culturally-exalted documentary form.[66] In this instance however the appearance of such "photographic evidence" served the opposite purpose. The photographer's lens-device created sufficient distance between viewers and corpse to remind them that they were indeed watching a television programme, to evoke other television programmes of the crime/forensic science genre, and to draw attention to the spectacle of the corpse itself. Yvonne's body in the episode operated not as a realist device, but as a rather gruesome site of possible visual pleasure. The corpse itself was another means of generating audience shock and awe- of maximising viewing figures by appealing to the voyeuristic impulses of existing audiences and the curiosity of non-*Bad Girls* fans with an interest in horror, crime drama and other bodily genres.

Tellingly, it was around this time (2004) that the forensic drama genre was peaking in popularity on the BBC, with shows like *Silent Witness* (1996-) and *Waking the Dead* (2000-) regularly attracting audiences to BBC1 in large numbers. *Bad Girls'* brief aesthetic and narrative departure into the forensic crime and bodily horror genres might easily be read as another attempt to compete with its rival by providing British viewers with what the popularity of the above shows suggests they might want: blood, gore and visual spectacle, with the potentially crowd-pleasing addition of sensationalised

---

[66] Deborah Jermyn, 'Women with a Mission: Lynda La Plante, DCI Jane Tennison and the Reconfiguration of TV Crime Drama,' p58. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6:1, 2003.

lesbianism. It is perhaps unsurprising given this possibility that the murder and the discovery of Atkins' body served as the focal point for the *Bad Girls* promotional materials that preceded its broadcast, the television advertising and trailers that alerted viewers to the arrival of the show's sixth series.

With its earlier homonormativity abandoned in favour of this kind of visual spectacle and the twist-driven narrative that facilitated it, the later series of *Bad Girls* tended increasingly towards excess in its quest for ratings. It is tempting to read this excess too as queer, if not explicitly gay, as the kind of camp disruption of conventional narrative and stylistic pleasures that Alexander Doty, Richard Dyer and others have identified within many aspects of popular visual culture.[67] At the very least it might be regarded as a carnivalesque challenge to British television's narrative status quo. The broader cultural and industrial contexts of the show's production however run counter to such an interpretation. That the shift from homonormativity to (heteronormative) excess coincided with the departure of David Liddiment and an unprecedented decline in ITV's popularity strongly suggests a commercial motivation at the base of this shift. The changes within *Bad Girls* over the course of its broadcast run suggest more than anything a desire on the part of producers and network executives to attract large audiences and generate revenue through revisiting earlier ratings success by returning to "populist" programme content, rather than an urge to toy subversively with the prison drama format.

---

[67] See for example Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty, *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*. London: Cassell, 1995 and Ed. Fabio Cleto, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

Sexuality and the Commercial Imperative

The programmes examined above by no means represent ITV's queer content in the 1997-2007 years in its entirety. Drama series like *At Home with the Braithwaites* (2000-03) and the long-running *Taggart* (1983-) have featured gay and lesbian characters in prominent roles, while the network's most popular programmes, the prime-time soap operas *Emmerdale* and *Coronation Street* (1960-), have integrated LGBT elements into their narratives since the 1990s, eliciting substantial media interest along the way.[68] Gay, lesbian and queer visibility on the network has by any standard increased exponentially in the intervening period. This chapter has focused so far on the effect of ITV's competitive relationship with the BBC on its recent gay, lesbian and queer programming, with reference to the BBC's own policy on sexual minority visibility (discussed at length in the previous chapter). The broader effects of the more general mainstreaming of 'alternative' sexualities that have taken place in Britain since the 1990s however have also played a part in determining the network's negotiation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer ideas and issues in its broadcast content. As the early paragraphs of this chapter have noted, ITV has a relatively light and undemanding public service remit which releases it from any stringent obligation to adequately 'represent' lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer communities. However, the very lack of a public service imperative and of any attendant government/ licence fee subsidies and protection raises the possibility that ITV has been, in the 1997-2007 period, a more sensitive indicator of public opinion on queer and lesbian, gay and bisexual issues than

---

[68] *Coronation Street*'s introduction of a male-to-female transgender character in 1998 (the first ever in British soap opera), and later broadcast of a controversial "gay kiss" between two male characters in 2003 spring to mind here.

any other broadcaster bar Channel 5/ Five. This is because, as a purely commercial entity, ITV must appeal to a large section of the viewing public in order to ensure its continual survival. As David Liddiment himself observed, "it's a mass channel or it's dead."[69] It must therefore necessarily furnish its audiences with programming that is likely to please, rather than offend them. In this respect, the presence of any kind of gay, lesbian or queer-themed programming on ITV in recent years might readily be interpreted as proof of the successful integration of gays and lesbians (if not always of queers) into the cultural mainstream.

Of course, as the earlier chapters have suggested, 'reflecting reality' is not the only concern of British television. Lesley Henderson concurs that television drama and specifically serial drama serves as "a barometer of shifting cultural values," a space in which social issues can be explored and resolved through narrative."[70] However, she adds, "there is an ambiguous relationship between seeking the public profile which a drama storyline can confer and simultaneously policing these storylines" to avoid alienating or offending key audience demographics.[71] A balance must be struck, between providing viewers with something resembling an accurate reflection of the world beyond the programme-text, and creating controversy as a means of stirring up public interest in the programme-product. While all television "shares a commercial imperative," for ITV shows "the economics of the industry are perhaps more overt, as these programmes are broadcast on commercial television."[72]

---

[69] David Liddiment, 'The James MacTaggart Lecture 2001,' p240.
[70] Lesley Henderson, *Social Issues in Television Fiction*, p21. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
[71] Ibid, p23.
[72] Ibid, p42.

A further possibility might therefore be proposed: that ITV, like other commercial broadcasters, has co-opted the increasingly visible issue of sexual diversity as a means of attracting viewers, harnessing what could still be construed as the spectacle of sexual difference to draw in the prurient and the idly curious.

Henderson observes that within the British television industry, "audiences are envisaged through the production process" of every programme broadcast.[73] Liddiment's comments indicate that through the 1990s and 2000s, the "envisaged" ITV audience was necessarily expansive and encompassed many demographics. ITV was after all a "mass channel" network rather than a relatively niche broadcaster like Channel 4. However as ITV's own history demonstrates, this "mass channel" approach to programming does not preclude the possibility that its imagined audience(s) might share certain attitudes, predispositions or characteristics. John Ellis identifies ITV in the 1960s for example as exhibiting a specifically "working class identity" accrued through a schedule chiefly comprising soaps and serials, quiz shows and popular sporting events like wrestling, which was designed to appeal to working British people, and to provide a lighter, more entertaining contrast to the highbrow offerings of the BBC.[74] The idea of a "mass channel" which attracted large numbers of viewers was not, for the ITV of the 1960s, incompatible with the idea that this pool of viewers might have certain values and interests in common, a preference for example for watching wrestling above televised Shakespeare adaptations. By 1990s and 2000s, the "mass" audience of which

---

[73] Ibid, p49.
[74] John Ellis, 'Importance, significance, cost and value,' p43.

ITV conceived had come to be defined not by what it *was*, ITV being no longer a network primarily for the working classes, but by what it *was not*: neither cosmopolitan as was the imagined Channel 4 audience, nor much invested in "quality" or what Hilary Hinds has termed "art" television, as was the imagined BBC audience. This imagined lack of cosmopolitan sophistication in its audience had ramifications for, and was reflected in the network's sexual minority programming. The presence of lesbian, gay and/or queer material within prime-time programming on Channel 4 and BBC2 (and increasingly BBC1) would as the earlier chapters of this project suggest most likely fail to elicit much outrage or even surprise in their respective audiences. The presence of similar content within ITV's evening programming however might very well have carried a certain shock value, at least for those viewers who lacked (as the network's executives imagined) the sophistication necessary to conceive of sexual diversity as a commonplace facet of contemporary British culture.

The gay, lesbian and queer material that *did* surface on ITV in the 1990s and 2000s was strategically positioned to elicit just the right amount of surprise from its audiences to encourage them to watch, and to continue watching, but not so much that it might risk alienating them altogether. So the network's lesbian gay, bisexual, transgender and queer representations have tended towards the gentle above the graphic, the implied above the explicitly *shown*, shows like *Bob and Rose* above for example *Queer as Folk*. The former show in fact provides a useful illustration of this point. However shocking the premise of a gay man having sex with a woman, very little sex was actually shown on screen, particularly in comparison to *Queer as Folk*'s more explicit detailing of gay male sexuality. Bob's exploration of his sexuality was primarily verbal rather than visual.

Though he talked a great deal about sex, about desire, and about his own sexual identity,

he was rarely shown actually *having* sex or physically expressing desire for men, or

indeed for Rose. Sex was implied non-verbally at various points throughout the series-

when Bob and Rose adjust their clothes after an encounter in a train toilet in episode 2,

when they are shown lying naked together in bed, and so on-but it was principally sex

between men and women, and was in any case physically articulated only very

infrequently. Even the erection which first betrayed Bob's attraction to Rose in a scene

pivotal to the show's narrative arc was *talked about*, rather than seen. The lack of *visible*

sex, queer or otherwise, within its gay-themed narrative spoke volumes ITV's complex

relationship with the representation of non-hetero sexuality. That is, it articulated the

tension between "policing" gay, lesbian and queer content for the benefit of (imagined)

audience sensibilities and exploiting its commercial possibilities for maximum profit.

Five

The above discussion has focused in part on ITV's relationship with the BBC, and with

good reason. For the greater part of the fifty-plus years of the network's existence, the

ITV/BBC duopoly not only dominated but defined the British television landscape. ITV

marketed itself to audiences as distinct from the BBC because for many years, the BBC

was its sole competitor. The arrival of Channel 4 inevitably forced a reconfiguration of

this landscape. However, as the above demonstrates, ITV continued to define its public

profile in relation to the scheduling policies of its long-term rival, against whom it has

been measured since the 1950s.

When Channel 5 was launched in 1997, British broadcasting was an entirely different proposition than it had been in 1955. The presence of multiple established terrestrial broadcasters, as well as the success of cable and satellite television providers had given UK audiences access to a minimum of four channels, and potentially to several hundred, each with its own unique brand identity, target demographics and scheduling policy. "Mass broadcasters" like ITV and BBC were joined by more niche-market propositions like Bravo, UK Gold and the Paramount comedy channel. It was into this ever-more-diversified multi-channel environment that 5 was first introduced.

Perhaps logically given this environment, 5 began itself as a niche-market broadcaster, a provider of entertainment programming to a specialised segment of the overall UK audience. In 2002 it relaunched as 'Five,' a non-specialised channel with "mass audience" aspirations. The following paragraphs examine 5's/Five's lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer programming (or lack thereof) between 1997 and 2007 in the context of these two very different identities, and seek to articulate the impact of the channel's shift from "niche" to "mainstream" on this programming.

Lad TV: Channel 5, 1997-2002

Citing Channel 5's own publicity material, Christine Fanthome notes the channel's tendency in its early years to market itself to a young, male demographic, and observes that "advertisers who [wished] to reach a more male audience of the social demographic

[were] likely to find Channel 5 an attractive proposition."[75] From its launch in March 1997 to its re-launch (as Five) in 2002, the channel offered its audiences a range of programming seemingly designed to appeal primarily to a certain kind of young heterosexual male. Principally these comprised sport, action films, "extreme" documentaries (often of a gory and/or sexually-explicit nature) and the soft-core pornography for which it became best known. The proliferation of such programming spoke of the economic constraints imposed upon the new channel. Unlike such established institutions as ITV and the BBC, the fledgling broadcaster 5 was unable to afford to invest in the production of its own material, heavily relying instead on acquired material of the type described above. It also spoke of the channel's attempt to forge a place for itself in the broadcasting market through the use of heterosexual masculinity and the erasure of queer presence as markers of brand identity, as signifiers of 5 as a committed purveyor of "Lad TV."

The kind of heterosexual masculinity to which 5 sought to appeal in its programming carried a distinct set of cultural connotations in 1990s Britain, with particular roots in the "New Lad" movement. John Beynon terms the New Lad "a throwback to a time when men had been able to behave badly and not worry about censure."[76] Created within British media spheres in the early 1990s an antidote to 1980s feminism, cultural constructions of the "New Man" and the imagined feminization of masculinity it engendered,[77] New Laddism was a genre of masculinity that centred on the celebration

---

[75] Christine Fanthome, *Channel 5: The Early Years*, p155. Luton, Beds: University of Luton Press, 2003.
[76] John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, p111. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002.
[77] Sean Nixon credits such men's magazines as Loaded and GQ in particular as helping to popularize the idea of the New Lad. For more on this, see Sean Nixon, 'Resignifying Masculinity: From 'New Man' to

of stereotypically "blokeish" masculine pursuits like beer, football, cars and the sexual consumption of women. The New Lad took unashamed pleasure in drinking, pornography and most importantly good times with other men, but was avowedly heterosexual to the exclusion of all other sexual possibilities, and particularly to the exclusion of queerness. As Bethan Benwell notes, "New Lad [...] marked a return to traditional masculine values of sexism, exclusive male friendship and homophobia."[78] The New Lad construct proved a hit in British popular culture, spawning a wave lad-themed television programming and an entirely new sub-genre of British literature dubbed "Lad Lit." Beynon points to the shows *Men Behaving Badly* (1992-98) and *Fantasy Football League* (1994-2004), and the early novels of the writer Nick Hornby as examples of this phenomenon. New Laddism also came to be associated with Britpop, a brand of male-dominated indie-pop music spearheaded by bands like Blur, Oasis, Suede and Pulp that sought, in the mid 1990s, to popularize a particular kind of patriotism through music and band images that valorised "Britishness" as well as the beer-swilling, football-enthusiast sensibilities of New Lad culture.[79]

The success of New Laddism as it manifested in broadcast and print media forms had a significant effect on the early scheduling decisions of Channel 5, and as did the movement's imagined impact on the behaviour of British men more generally. Beynon asserts that, "although the new lad [may have been] objectionable, selfish, loutish and inconsiderate, building his life around drinking, football and sex, he was just as

'New Lad." Eds. David Morley and Kevin Robins, *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality and Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
[78] Bethan Benwell, 'Introduction: Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines,' p13. Ed. Bethan Benwell, *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines*. London: Blackwell, 2003.
[79] For a more detailed discussion of Brit Pop and British identity, see David Hesmondhalgh, 'British Popular Music and National Identity.' *British Cultural Studies*.

concerned with consumerism and labels as his new man elder brother."[80] No less than the New Man that preceded him and the metrosexual that developed alongside him (see Chapter 3), the New Lad was inclined towards the consumption of fragrances, designer labels and men's health products, as Tim Edwards among others has suggested.[81] In this respect, the New Lad represented an ideal audience for 5 and its advertisers, and provides some indication of the underlying reasons for the demographic targeting which Fanthome and 5's own publicity material describe, and which its programming in years 1997 to 2002 suggests.

5's early acquisition of the rights to a number of key sporting events (including several high profile football and rugby matches), its reliance on imported US action films like *Broken Arrow* (1996), *Courage Under Fire* (1996) and *Independence Day* (1996), all of which achieved high ratings for the channel, and its habitual broadcast of soft-core pornography like *The Red Shoe Diaries* (1992-97) and sex-themed documentaries like the *Sex and Shopping* series (1998) all indicated its commitment to the provision of "New Lad TV," at least in the early-evening, prime-time and post-watershed hours. Dawn Airey, 5's Director of Programmes (and later Chief Executive) famously described the channel's schedule as chiefly comprising "films, football and fucking."[82] This was an output likely to appeal greatly to an audience of young men encouraged by the media frenzy surrounding New Laddism to gorge on a diet of the latter two. That this "fucking" failed to encompass non-heterosexual content beyond the occasional inclusion of (straight male-oriented) girl-on-girl sex was perhaps unsurprising, given the New Lad

---

[80] John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, p111.
[81] Tim Edwards, *Cultures of Masculinity*. London: Routledge, 2006.
[82] Dawn Airey, cited in Jane Arthurs, *Television and Sexuality: Regulation and the Politics of Taste*, p42. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, 2004.

movement's aversion to queerness. Likewise the absence of gay, lesbian and queer material more generally on 5 offered some suggestion of the channel's reluctance to offend the potentially-homophobic sensibilities of one of its key demographics.[83] Only the imported American action-drama *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001) provided some frisson of lesbian eroticism via its suggestion of an attraction between its two central characters, the leather-clad action hero Xena and her sidekick Gabrielle. However this too, as it appeared within Airey's New Lad-appeasing schedules, was easily read as a further example of girl-on-girl sexuality constructed to pander to heterosexual male fantasy.

The Rebrand: Five, 2002 onwards

The departure of Airey and the subsequent installation of Kevin Lygo as Director of Programmes in 2001 though provided what Fanthome calls "a natural opportunity for reflection on and reappraisal of the company's corporate image and programming aims."[84] In practice this equated to a removal of the erotic, pornographic and risqué programming that helped 5 establish its early brand identity, including what little LGB and queer content this programming afforded, and the channel's acquisition of a range of successful, high-budget US drama series that it sought to integrate into its prime-time schedules. Among these were *CSI: Crime Scene Investigations* and *Law and Order*, as well as the Australian soap opera *Home and Away* (1988-), formerly an early evening hit for ITV. Soft porn and adult programming had been, in Fanthome's words, "an

---

[83] There are of course exceptions to this overall policy, most obviously Channel 5's acquisition of the rights to broadcast the Mr Gay UK contest in 1998 and 1999.
[84] Christine Fanthome, *Channel 5: The Early Years*, p183.

inexpensive way to attract viewers, a cheap fix to get the channel up and running."[85]

However, once established, 5 (or rather its executives and the company which as of 2000 comprised its majority shareholder, Radio Television Luxembourg) sought to shed Airey's "films, fucking and football" ethos in favour of something more likely to draw in wider audiences, and not just the niche New Lad market.

In September 2002, Channel 5 was renamed Five and officially rebranded, this time as a more sophisticated and sanitised product suitable for mainstream consumption. 5's Director of Marketing, David Pullan claimed that the re-launch

> Set out to achieve three key objectives: to clarify the channel's creative strategy; to refresh the channel's on-screen identity; and to address the gap between the common perceptions of Five and the new reality of our programming - stimulating viewers' reappraisal of Five's programmes and brand.[86]

"Common perceptions" of the channel had previously focused on its provision of adult programming. Fanthome notes that, despite its appeal to some young male audiences, "the adult programming could […] be cited as responsible for causing major damage to the company's image."[87] Unlike 5, though, Five could be relied upon to deliver mainstream material of a high quality that was far less likely to cause offence to those who had previously found its pornographic content off-putting.

---

[85] Ibid, p181.
[86] 'Multimillion pound rebrand for Channel 5,' *Guardian*, 23rd August 2002.
[87] Christine Fanthome, *Channel 5: The Early Years*, p181.

The loss of its sexually-explicit material however had consequences for the newly-relaunched channel, and contributed in no small way to a recent decline in evening ratings that continues as of the time of writing. Fanthome observes that, for Channel 5, the area of greatest growth and the time that frequently attracted the greatest number of viewers was the post-watershed period, that is, the scheduling period generally reserved for soft porn and other erotica. If this content had alienated some viewers, it had successfully appealed to its core (young, male) audience. The removal of this content meant the alienation of this audience, albeit in the form of collateral damage. Five's pursuit of mainstream acceptability necessarily entailed the demise of Lad TV. Mainstream acceptability however proved difficult to come by for Five. In 2002, just as adult entertainment (as well as films and football) was being phased out of the schedules, overall annual ratings for the channel stood at 6.3% of the overall audience share, having climbed steadily from 2.3% since 1997.[88] By 2006, after just over three years of mainstream programming, the figure had fallen to 5.7%, and fell again to 5.1% in 2007, a significant decrease for so new a broadcaster.[89] The implication was clear. For a new and non-established terrestrial broadcaster to succeed in an overpopulated multi-channel environment, it must necessarily maintain a strong and consistent brand identity, and seek to appeal to several targeted markets rather than an undifferentiated "mass audience."

Curiously, neither the re-brand nor the attempt to establish mainstream appeal signalled the beginning of an increase in queer visibility or LGB-themed television on

---

[88] Figures courtesy of BARB.
[89] Ibid.

Five. While the occasional gay or lesbian personality or talking-head appeared within the context of the channel's reality shows-notably interior decorators Colin McAllister and Justin Ryan, creators and co-hosts of *How Not To Decorate* (2004-) and *Colin and Justin's Wedding Belles* (2006)-queer/lesbian, gay and bisexual content was for the most part absent in its original drama and entertainment programming.[90] This absence strongly suggests that, for Five's executive personnel, queer, lesbian and gay visibility in narrative programming could not be reconciled with the notion of "mainstream" success, despite the presence of such visibility on both ITV and BBC1. Equally, however, it serves to highlight Five's more general lack of original narrative-driven programme content.

The absence of original narrative programming and so of UK-produced gay, lesbian and queer content on the channel resulted directly from its relaunch. Five, unlike Channel 5, sought to establish a reputation for quality and achieve the coveted mainstream success principally through imported drama, rather than home-grown material, and especially through the strategic deployment throughout its prime-time schedule of high budget American shows like *CSI*, *Law and Order*, *NCIS* (CBS, 2003-) and *House* (Fox, 2004-). These shows did, from time to time, touch upon sexual minority issues. *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* (NBC, 1999-) for example explored trans- and homophobic hate crime in several standalone episodes of its early seasons. However, since these shows failed to consistently fore-ground lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer material (as did, say, HBO's *Oz*, broadcast in the UK on Channel 4 and discussed in an earlier chapter) and

---

[90] It is also worth noting here that *Tripping Over* (2006), an original British/ Australian ensemble drama first broadcast on Five, also featured a gay character in a prominent role, as well as several others in more minor roles.

since they only occasionally introduced any such material into their larger, hetero-centric narratives, they are of only tangential interest to this project, which in any case takes British rather than American-made queer and lesbian, gay and bisexual programming as its primary focus.

Conclusions

The overall rise in the cultural visibility and legal and social status afforded queer and LGBT Britons since 1997 suggests at face value that queer and lesbian, gay and bisexual visibility on British commercial television networks will follow (at least for the foreseeable future) an inevitable upward trajectory. It also suggests that this upward trajectory will be articulated via an increase in lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer content and characters in terrestrial broadcast programming. This assessment however fails to take into account crucial industrial considerations, and specifically the fates of the individual networks on which this increased visibility will manifest. As of 2009, the futures of both ITV and Five are far from certain. The decline in Five's audience figures reported in 2006 and 2007 has continued into 2008 and, so far, 2009. At the time of writing, intense media speculation surrounds a proposed merger of Five with the more public-service oriented Channel 4. ITV (and principally its flagship terrestrial channel, ITV1) likewise continues to shed viewers, with monthly audience numbers reaching a particularly low 14.6% of the overall audience share in August 2008.[91] These losses raise the question, not of how queer and lesbian, gay and bisexual programming on these

---

[91] Figures courtesy of BARB

commercial terrestrial networks will look in a decade from now, but of whether the networks themselves will exist in any form equipped to house such programming.

Given Channel 4's history of furnishing its audience with diverse gay and queer themed programming, and its ongoing public service remit, the proposed amalgamation with Five suggests at least the possibility of an increase in the latter network's queer/ lesbian, gay and bisexual output in the event of such a merger. For ITV, quite the reverse may be true. Recent proposals by former ITV Chairman Michael Grade have advocated that the network disregard even the meager public service obligations that currently constrain it, and progress towards an exclusively commercial business model, with less interference from Ofcom regarding broadcast content.[92] What impact such a progression is apt to make on the network's lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer material remains to be seen.

---

[92] See for example, 'Michael Grade: Now TV's Golden Age is Over, ITV Must Be Allowed to Compete,' *Independent*, 14th October 2008.

Conclusion

I began this project in 2006, during Tony Blair's second term in office as Prime Minister, nine years into Labour's first spell in government since the 1970s. Much has changed within the British cultural and political environment in the last three years. The nature of these changes, however, could potentially have consequences both for LGBT and queer rights and for gay, lesbian and queer visibility within the media.

While one aim of this project is to analyse the range of LGB and queer representations offered by British terrestrial television within Blair's decade as Prime Minister and the relationship of these representations to the cultural and political landscape that engendered them, it also serves (less overtly) as a critique of that landscape. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, assimilationist representations of gay and lesbian characters support a broader, policy-driven absorption of individual gays and lesbians into an imagined cultural mainstream. This is often to the detriment of a queer theory and politics that favours the dismantling of the values and ideologies of that mainstream. As gays and lesbians have been embraced by and normalised through inclusion within the mainstream and its media, so queers have been driven further out of it. The result has been a reproduction across the better part of the British media spectrum (with the exception perhaps of Channel 4) of the "good homosexual"/"dangerous queer" dichotomy that Anna Marie Smith identifies as informing Conservative government rhetoric on sexuality during the Thatcher era.[1]

---

[1] Anna Marie Smith, 'The Imaginary Inclusion of the Assimilable 'Good Homosexual': The British New Right's Representations of Sexuality and Race.' *Diacritics* 24:2/3, 1994.

As of 2009, though, the Labour party that spearheaded the social inclusion of "good homosexuals" has all but crumbled. Though it remains in government at the time of writing, Gordon Brown having replaced Blair as Prime Minister in 2007, the huge losses suffered by the party in both the local and European elections in June 2009 and the significant number of seats gained by David Cameron's Conservative party in the same point to the very strong probability of a Conservative victory at the next general election. This project has suggested that the rise of gay, lesbian and queer visibility on British television and within the British media more generally since 1997 can be at least partially attributed to the policy changes implemented by the Blair government. One might be tempted to speculate as to the possible changes wrought upon LGBT and queer media representation by a Cameron government, and the changes to the UK cultural landscape that such a government would likely bring. Cameron's somewhat mixed Commons voting record on gay rights issues in the 2000s however raises at least the possibility that the further social inclusion of gays and lesbians through legislative measures might be lower down on his agenda as Prime Minister than it was on Blair's during his time in the role.[2] The engendering of a less socially-inclusive climate within the UK could well lead to an alteration in the modes of queer and LGBT visibility offered by British terrestrial television, if not necessarily to a decline in its volume.

---

[2] Despite his recent support for both the Civil Partnership Act and the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations, Cameron consistently opposed both the repeal of Section 28 (in 2003) and the Adoption and Children Bill (in 2002), the terms of which allowed same-sex couples to adopt. 'The Public Whip': Voting record for David Cameron MP, Witney <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/mp.php?mpid=1932&dmp=826> [13/06/09].

This possible cultural and political shift would itself represent an opportunity for further investigation into the impact of government policy, cultural climate and industrial practice on gay, queer and other forms of non-heterosexual representation on British television. This project's methodology-utilising government and broadcasting industry policy documents alongside television programme content as a means of drawing conclusions about individual broadcasters specifically, and the UK cultural climate more generally-lends itself readily to further studies of LGBT and queer visibility within British broadcasting, and within broadcasting climates beyond the UK. The project's emphasis on branding and individual brand identity, as one means of interpreting individual broadcasters and their respective attitudes to the representation of sexual diversity, could also be used in this way. As Jane Arthurs, Paul Grainge and others have noted, the distinct brand identities of television channels and broadcasting institutions have necessarily strengthened as digitisation has caused the sheer number of available channels to swell, competition for audiences to increase and the broadcasting market to diversify and fragment. Further consideration of channel brand identity in the British context and beyond can produce further conclusions as to the relationship between the types of gay, lesbian and queer representation (or lack thereof) offered by individual channels, and the brand identities *of* these channels. Equally, the policy/industry/text approach can be applied to studies with a focus on media representations of other expressions of identity: gender, class, ethnicity and other contested categories.

Finally: although the previous chapters have made frequent reference to LGBT visibility, scant attention has been paid to the issue of transgender representation on contemporary British television. This is in part attributable to the insufficient volume of

transgender representations within terrestrial programming, and certainly within the kind of narrative programming on which this project focuses. Beyond one or two isolated instances of representation within dramas and soap operas (notably the introduction of a female to male transgender character, Hayley Cropper, into *Coronation Street* in 1998), transgender visibility on British television has largely occurred since 1997 within non-narrative formats, primarily documentary programming and reality television. The victory and subsequent cross-media interest in *Big Brother* winner Nadia Almada and such documentaries as Channel 4's *Make Me A Man* (2002) have contributed to an increase in the volume and range of transgender representations.[3] These representations warrant further research, while further analysis of political and broadcasting industry policy pertaining to transgender issues would better contextualise instances of transgender visibility within the specific socio-cultural climate from which they emerged.

As discussed at length in the introductory chapter of this project, very little material currently exists that focuses specifically on British queer and LGBT television programming, and none that examines this programming in the context of the UK television industry. This project represents a necessary contribution to gay, lesbian and queer screen studies- and has, I hope, opened up further lines of enquiry into the field that might fruitfully be explored in the future.

---

[3] *Make Me a Man* documented transman Stephen Whittle's phalloplasty and subsequent recovery from surgery.

Digitisation strongly suggests the likelihood of an increase in the range of gay, lesbian and queer representations on British television. More and diverse channels, each with unique brand identities and specific target audiences, bring the possibility of more and diverse modes of LGBT and queer visibility. Current modes of non-heterosexual visibility are, as this project has demonstrated, somewhat limited. It is my hope however that the switch to digital will create further space for the representation and negotiation of non-normative sexual identities and behaviours, and that this space might continue to develop regardless of any potential cultural and political shifts towards Conservatism.

References

Academic Works

Alderson, David and Linda Anderson, *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

Arthurs, Jane. '*Sex and the City* and Consumer Culture: Remediating Postfeminist Drama.' *Feminist Media Studies* 3:1, 2003.

---. *Television and Sexuality: Regulation and the Politics of Taste.* Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, 2004.

Battles, Kathleen and Wendy Hilton-Morrow. 'Gay Characters in Conventional Spaces: *Will and Grace* and the Situation Comedy Genre.' *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19:1, 2002.

Beck, Ulrich.'The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies.' *Theory, Culture and Society* 19:1-2, 2002.

Becker, Ron. *Gay TV and Straight America.* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006.

Beirne, Rebecca. 'Fashioning *The L Word*.' *Nebula* 3:4, December 2006.

Benwell, Bethan. *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines.* London: Blackwell, 2003.

Beynon, John. *Masculinities and Culture*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002.

Bignell, Jonathan and Stephen Lacey. *Popular Television Drama: Critical Perspectives*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005.

Billingham, Peter. *Sensing the City Through Television: Urban Identities in Fiction*. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2000.

Binnie, Jon and Beverley Skeggs, 'Cosmopolitan knowledge and the production and consumption of sexualised space: Manchester's gay village.' *The Sociological Review* 52:1, 2004.

Born, Georgina. 'Strategy, positioning and projection in digital television: Channel 4 and the commercialisation of public service broadcasting in the UK.' *Media, Culture & Society* 25:6, 2003.

---. *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*. London: Secker & Warburg, 2004.

Bourne, Stephen. *Brief Encounters: Lesbians and gays in British cinema 1930-1971*. London: Cassell, 1996.

Briggs, Asa. *A History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (New Edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Brunsdon, Charlotte. 'Lifestyling Britain: The 8-9 Slot on British Television.' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6:5, 2003.

Buscombe, Edward. *British Television: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). London: Routledge, 1999.

Cairns, Lucille. *Gay and Lesbian Cultures in France*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002.

Caldwell, John. 'Critical Industrial Practice: Branding, Repurposing, and the Migratory Patterns of Industrial Texts.' *Television and New Media* 7:2, 2006.

Caplan, Patricia. *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*. London: Routledge, 1987.

Chadwick, Andrew and Andrew Hefferman. *The New Labour Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.

Chedgzoy, Kate, Emma Francis and Murray Pratt. *In A Queer Place: Sexuality and Belonging in British and European Contexts*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002.

Cheng, Pheng and Bruce Robbins, *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

Cleto, Fabio. *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

Couldry, Nick. 'Playing for Celebrity: *Big Brother* as ritual event.' *Television & New Media* 3:3, 2002.

Cowan, Katherine and Gill Valentine, *Tuned Out: The BBC's Portrayal of Lesbian and Gay People*. London: Stonewall, 1996.

Creeber, Glen. *Dennis Potter: Between Two Worlds: A Critical Assessment*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998.

---. '"Hideously White": British Television, Glocalisation and National Identity.' *Television & New Media* 5:1, 2004.

---. *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen.* London: BFI, 2004.

Creekmur, Corey K. and Alexander Doty, *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995.

Crisell, Andrew. *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting: Second Edition.* London: Routledge, 2002.

Curran, James and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press, Broadcasting and New Media in Britain, Sixth Edition.* London: Routledge, 2003.

D'Emilio, John and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America,* 2nd edition. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Davis, Glyn. *BFI TV Classics: Queer as Folk.* London: BFI, 2007.

De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1984.

Dick, Sam. *Homophobic Hate Crime: The Gay British Crime Survey 2008*, p5. London: Stonewall, 2008.

Dickens, Linda. 'The Road is Long: Thirty Years of Equality Legislation in Britain.' *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 45:3, 2007.

Doty, Alexander. *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture.* Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Durham, Meenakshi Gigi and Douglas M. Kellner, *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*. London: Blackwell, 2001.

Dyer, Richard. *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation.* London: Routledge, 2002.

Edwards, Tim. *Cultures of Masculinity*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Ellis, John. 'Scheduling: The Last Creative Act in Television?' *Media, Culture and Society* 22:1, 2000.

---. *Seeing Things: Television in the age of uncertainty*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.

Ellis, Sonja J. and Celia Kitzinger, 'Denying Equality: An Analysis of Arguments against Lowering the Age of Consent between Men.' *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 12:3, 2002.

Fairclough, Norman. *New Labour, New Language?* London: Routledge, 2000.

Fanthome, Christine. *Channel 5: The Early Years*. Luton: University of Luton Press, 2003.

Foucault, Michel. *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: 1*. London: Penguin, 1998.

Franklin, Bob. *British Television Policy: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 2001.

---. *Television Policy: The MacTaggart Lectures*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

Freedman, Des. *Television Policies of the Labour Party, 1951-2001*. London: Frank Cass, 2003.

Fuss, Diane. *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Giddings, Robert and Keith Selby. *The Classic Serial on Television and Radio*. Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave, 2001.

Gluckman, Amy and Betsy Reed. *Homoeconomics: Capitalism, Community and Lesbian and Gay Life*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Glynn, Kevin. *Tabloid Culture*: *Trash Taste, Popular Power and the Transformation of American Television*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000.

Grainge, Paul. '*Lost* Logos: Channel 4 and the Branding of American Event Television' (unpublished article).

Griffiths, Robin. *British Queer Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998.

Hanson, Ellie. *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999.

Hantke, Steffen. *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear*. Jackson, Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2004.

Harris, Anita. *All about the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Harvey, Sylvia. 'Ofcom's first year and neoliberalism's blind spot: attacking the culture of production.' *Screen* 47:1, 2006.

Healy, Murray. 'Were we being served? Homosexual Representations in Popular British Comedy'. *Screen* 36:3, 1995.

Henderson, Lesley. *Social Issues in Television Fiction.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Hennessy, Rosemary. *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism.* London: Routledge, 2002.

Herman, Didi. '*Bad Girls* Changed My Life: Homonormativity in a Women's Prison Drama.' *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20:2, June 2003.

Hesmondhalgh, David. 'Media and cultural policy as public policy.' *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 11:1, March 2005.

Higson, Andrew. *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama since 1980.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Hill, Annette. '*Big Brother*: The Real Audience.' *Television & New Media* 3:3, 2002.

Holmes, Su and Deborah Jermyn. *Understanding Reality Television.* London: Routledge, 2005.

Hunt, Ruth and Johan Jensen. *The School Report: The Experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools*, p3. London: Stonewall, 2007.

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions.* New York: Verso, 2005.

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture.* London: Routledge, 1992.

Jenkins, Henry and John Tulloch. *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek.* London: Routledge, 1995.

Jermyn, Deborah. 'Women with a Mission: Lynda La Plante, DCI Jane Tennison and the Reconfiguration of TV Crime Drama.' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6:1, 2003.

Johnson, Catherine. 'Telebranding in TV III: The Network as Brand and the Programme as Brand.' *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 5: 1, April 2007.

Johnson, Catherine and Rob Turnock. *ITV Cultures: Independent Television over Fifty Years*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005.

Johnson, Paul. 'Ordinary Folk and Cottaging: Law, Morality and Public Sex.' *Journal of Law and Society* 34:4, December 2007.

Keller, James R. *Queer (Un)Friendly Film and Television*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2002.

Kleinecke-Bates, Iris. *Victorian Realities: Representations of the Victorian Age in 1990s Television* (unpublished thesis).

Lacey, Nick. *Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies*. Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan, 2000.

Levitas, Ruth. *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*. London: Macmillan, 1998.

Lotz, Amanda D. 'Postfeminist Television Criticism: Rehabilitating Critical Terms and Identifying Postfeminist Attributes.' *Feminist Media Studies* 1:1, 2001.

Lowe, Gregory Ferrell and Per Jauert. *Cultural Dilemmas in Public Service Broadcasting*. Göteborg, Sweden: Nordicom, 2005.

McGhee, Derek. *Intolerant Britain? Hate, Citizenship and Difference.* Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005.

McGuigan, Jim. *Culture and the Public Sphere.* London: Routledge, 1996.

McKee, Alan. 'Interview with Russell T. Davies.' *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies'* 16:2, 2002.

McNair, Brian. *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratisation of Desire.* London: Routledge, 2002.

Malik, Sarita. *Representing Black Britain: Black and Asian Images on Television.* London: Sage, 2002.

Millbank, Jenni. 'It's About *This*: Lesbians, Prisons, Desire.' *Social and Legal Studies* 13:2, 2004.

Mittell, Jason. *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture.* London: Routledge, 2004.

Morley, David and Kevin Robins. *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality and Identity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Morris, Charles E. and Jim M. Sloop. '"What Lips These Lips Have Kissed": Refiguring the Politics of Queer Public Kissing.' *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3:1, 2006.

Mosely, Rachel and Jacinta Read, 'Having it *Ally*: Popular Television (Post-) Feminism.' *Feminist Media Studies* 2:2, 2002.

Munt, Sally R. *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space.* New York: New York University Press, 1998.

---. 'Shame/pride dichotomies in *Queer as Folk*.' *Textual Practice* 14:3, 2000.

Neale, Stephen. *Genre*. London: BFI, 1980.

Needham, Gary and Glyn Davis. *Queer TV*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Nelson, Robin. *TV Drama in Transition: Forms, Values and Cultural Change.* London: Macmillan, 1997.

Newman, Janet. *Modernising Governance: New Labour, Policy and Society.* London: Sage, 2001.

Padva, Gilad. 'Unruly Womanness, Gender Dysphoria, and Anita Faleli's Iconography.' *Feminist Media Studies* 6:1, 2006.

Perryman, Neil. 'Doctor Who and the Convergence of Media: A Case Study in 'Transmedia Storytelling." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14:1, 2008.

Pidduck, Julianne. *Contemporary Costume Film: Space, Place and the Past.* London: BFI, 2004.

Prideaux, Simon. *Not So New Labour: A Sociological Critique of New Labour's Policy and Practice.* Bristol: Policy Press, 2005.

Rixon, Paul. *American Television on British Screens: A Story of Cultural Interaction.* Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Sandberg, Russell and Norman Doe. 'Religious Exemptions in Discrimination Law.' *Cambridge Law Journal* 66:2, 2007.

Sanderson, Terry. *Mediawatch: Treatment of Male and Female Homosexuality in the British Media.* London: Cassell, 1995.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet.* Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1990.

---. *Tendencies.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993.

Sendall, Bernard. *Independent Television in Britain.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982.

Skelton, Tracey and Gill Valentine, *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures.* London: Routledge, 1998.

Smith, Anna Marie. 'The Imaginary Inclusion of the Assimilable 'Good Homosexual': The British New Right's Representations of Sexuality and Race.' *Diacritics* 24:2/3, 1994.

Smith, Paul. *Boys: Masculinities in Contemporary Culture.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996.

Smith, Paul. 'The Politics of UK television policy: The making of Ofcom.' *Media, Culture and Society* 28:6, 2006.

Snitow, Ann, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality.* New York : Monthly Review Press, 1983.

Spigel, Lynn and Jan Olsson. *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Steemers, Jeanette. *Changing Channels: Prospects for Television in a Digital World.* Luton: University of Luton Press, 1998.

Stychin, Carl F. 'Being Gay.' *Government and Opposition* 40:1, 2005.

---. *Governing Sexuality: The Changing Politics of Sexuality and Law Reform.* Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2003.

---. 'Not (Quite) a Horse and Carriage: The Civil Partnership Act 2004.' *Feminist Legal Studies* 14:1, 2006.

Swaab, Peter. 'Review of *The Line of Beauty.' Film Quarterly* 60:3, 2007.

Thompson, Robert J. and Gary Burns, *Making Television: Authorship and the Production Process.* Westport, Connecticut: Prager, 1990.

Tracey, Michael. *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Tudor, Andrew. 'Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre.' *Cultural Studies* 11:3, 1997.

Vicinus, Martha. '"They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong": The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity.' *Feminist Studies* 18:3, 1992.

Wagg, Stephen. *Because I Tell A Joke Or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Waites, Matthew. 'Regulation of Sexuality: Age of Consent, Section 28 and Sex Education.' *Parliamentary Affairs* 54:3, 2001.

White, Stuart. 'Interpreting the 'Third Way': Not One Route, But Many.' *Renewal* 6:1, 1998.

Winnubst, Shannon. *Queering Freedom*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Williams, Raymond. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Wilton, Tamsin. *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Wlodarz, Joe. 'Maximum Insecurity: Genre Trouble and Closet Erotics in and out of HBO's *Oz*.' *Camera Obscura* 20:1, 2005.

Wright, T.R. *Thomas Hardy on Screen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Policy Documents and Hansard Debates

BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2001/2002. London: BBC.

BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2002/2003. London: BBC.

BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2003/2004. London: BBC.

BBC Royal Charter 1996. London: HMSO.

BBC Royal Charter 2006. London: HMSO.

BBC Statements of Programme Policy 2006/2007. London: BBC.

Broadcasting Act 1990 (c.42). London: HMSO.

Channel 4 Statement of Programme Promises 2007. London: Channel 4.

Channel 4 Television Corporation Report and Financial Statements 1985. London: Channel 4.

Channel 4 Television Corporation Report and Financial Statements 1999. London: Channel 4.

Communications Act 2003 (c.21). London: HMSO.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport. *Building a Global Audience: British Television in Overseas Markets- A Report by David Graham and Associates.* London: DCMS, 1999.

Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007. London: HMSO.

Hansard HC Deb 21st February 1994, vol. 238, cc.97-100.

Hansard HC Deb 9th November 2006, vol.426, c.776: Report Stage.

Hansard HL Deb 13th April 1999, vol. 559, cc.647-760.

ITV Statement of Programme Commitments 2003. London: ITV.

Local Government Act 1988 (c.9). London: HMSO.

Sexual Offences Act 2003 (c.42). London: HMSO.

Journalism, Online Resources and Other Texts

4Health: 'Coming Out' at Channel4.com
<http://www.channel4.com/health/microsites/0-9/4health/sex/lgb_comingout.html>
[18/05/08]

'Archbishop: Adoption Rules Put Other Charity Work at Risk.' *Daily Mail* 30th
January 2007.

'BBC America: Frequently Asked Questions.'
<http://www.bbcamerica.com/faq.jsp> [09/10/08].

'BBC Three Commissions Sinchronicity, a Manchester-Based Drama' at
BBC.co.uk
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2006/04_april/18/sinchroni
city.shtml>
[07/07/08]

'BBC4: Frequently Asked Questions' at BBC.co.uk
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/faq.shtml> [04/07/08]

Billen, Andrew. 'There's Nowt So Queer As Folk.' *New Statesman*, 8th December
2003.

'Cardinal asks Prime Minister and Cabinet to exempt adoption agencies from Equalities Act.' Website for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster <http://www.rcdow.org.uk/cardinal/default.asp?library_ref=&content_ref=1179> [26/03/08].

'Champagne, Pedicures and a Place in History for the Belfast Brides.' *Guardian* 19th December 2005.

'The Channel 4 Audience' at Channel4.com <http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/W/wtc4/audience/c4audience.html#upmarket> [03/01/08].

'Davies pens steamy Chatterley drama.' *Guardian*, 22nd January 2003

Davies, Russell T. *The New Doctor Who Adventures: Damaged Goods*. London: Virgin Publishing, 1996.

---. 'A Rose by Any Other Name.' *Observer,* 2nd September 2001.

Duncan, Andy. 'The New Statesman Media Lecture.' *New Statesman*, 26th June 2006.

'The Fourth Way.' *Guardian,* 29th July 2001.

'Gay Adoption: True Stories.' *Independent* 25th January 2007.

'Gay couples to get joint rights.' BBC News website
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3584285.stm> [03/04/07].

'Government will scrap S28, says Cunningham.' Local Government Chronicle,
10th June 1999 <http://www.lgcplus.com/government-will-scrap-s28-says-
cunningham/1417232.article> [12/06/08]

Hagan, Ed. 'Are You Being Served? Has Turning on Mainstream TV Become Part
of Tuning into Our Identity?' *Out* magazine, August 2007
<http://out.com/detail.asp?id=22721> [11/07/08].

---. 'Why does the gay community love *Doctor Who*?'
<http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/tv/2007/06/why_does_the_gay_community_lov.html>
[06/06/08]

Hari, Johann. 'Why I Hate Little Britain.' *Independent*, 21st November 2005.

'The House that Jacko Built.' *Guardian*, 29th October 2001.

Interview with Maureen Chadwick and Ann McManus
<http://www.badgirls.co.uk/library/int_other/int_ac1.html> [21/10/2008].

'Interview with Rikki Beadle-Blair' <http://www.pinktink.250x.com/misc/rikkiBB.htm> [20/12/07].

'ITV to screen gay drama during peak time.' *Guardian*, 20th June 2000.

'Key Facts' at BBC.co.uk<http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/keyfacts/stories/bbcthree.shtml> [04/07/08]

Kreigh, LeeAnn. 'Interview with *Bad Girls* creator Maureen Chadwick' at AfterEllen.com <http://www.afterellen.com/people/2007/3/chadwick?page=0%2C0> [20/10/2008].

Labour Party Manifesto 1997. BBC News <http://www.bbc.co.uk/election97/background/parties/manlab/labman.html> [16/03/07].

'Last Night's TV.' *Guardian* 20th December 2005.

Lo, Malinda. 'Jekyll and the Civilising Influence of Women.' *AfterEllen.com* <http://www.afterellen.com/TV/2007/8/jekyll?page=0%2C0> [01/07/08].

'Michael Grade: Now TV's Golden Age is Over, ITV Must Be Allowed to Compete.' *Independent*, 14th October 2008.

'More than 15,500 Civil Partnerships Prove Popularity of Legislation.' *Guardian* 5th December 2006.

'Multimillion pound rebrand for Channel 5.' *Guardian*, 23rd August 2002.

'The Public Whip': Voting record for David Cameron MP, Witney <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/mp.php?mpid=1932&dmp=826> [13/06/09].

'Regulation Must Not Trump Conscience.' *Telegraph* 31s January 2007.

'Reports, Policies and Guidelines: Equal opportunities at the BBC' at BBC.co.uk http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/policies/diversity.shtml [07/06/08].

'Scheduling Digital Channels' at Channel4.com <http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/W/wtc4/scheduling/digital.html> [03/01/08].

'Series 3 Q & A with Ann McManus and Maureen Chadwick.' <http://www.badgirls.co.uk/library/int_other/int_ac1.html> [30/10/2008]

'Sexual Disorientation.' *Telegraph* 24th January 2007.

'Sexuality Q&A' at Channel4.com

<http://www.channel4.com/health/microsites/A/adultat14/sexuality/sexuality_qa.shtml> [18/05/08]

Simpson, Mark. 'Here come the mirror men.' *Independent*, 15th November 1994.

Smart, Emma. 'Review of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit.*' *Screen Online* <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/589721> [24/05/08].

'*Stonewall*: "We're Still Fighting."' *Independent*, 6th August 2007.

'Sugar Rush' website at Channel4.com

<http://www.channel4.com/life/microsites/S/sugar_rush/show.html> [02/01/08].

Tatchell, Peter. 'MPs Target Sex in Public Toilets.' [18/06/08] <http://www.petertatchell.net>.

Thompson, Mark. 'Mark Thompson's MacTaggart Lecture.' *Guardian*, 23rd August 2002.

'Torchwood sets record for BBC America.' AfterElton.com.

<http://www.afterelton.com/blog/dennis/Torchwood-sets-record-for-BBC-America?#comment-26711> [15/07/08].

'Tories' Anger as Cameron Backs Blair on Adoption.' *Daily Mail* 30th January 2007.

'Two Churches, One View and a Question of Conscience.' *Guardian* 25th January 2007.

'Was Archbishop's Intervention a Mistake?' *Guardian* 25th January 2007.

Waters, Sarah. *Tipping the Velvet*. London: Virago, 1999.

Selected Television Programmes

Agatha Christie's Marple. ITV Productions/WGBH/Agatha Christie Limited. First broadcast: ITV1, 12th December 2004.

Bad Girls. Shed Productions for ITV. First broadcast: ITV, 1st June 1999.

Bob and Rose. Red Productions for ITV. First broadcast: ITV, 10th September 2001.

Fingersmith. Sally Head Productions for BBC TV. First broadcast: BBC1, 27th March 2005.

Gimme Gimme Gimme. Tiger Aspect for BBC TV. First broadcast: BBC2, 8th January 1999.

Jekyll. British Broadcasting Corporation for BBC America. First broadcast: BBC1, 16th June 2007 [UK].

Little Britain. British Broadcasting Corporation. First broadcast: BBC3, 16th September 2003.

Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit. British Broadcasting Corporation. First broadcast: BBC2, 10th January 1990.

Queer as Folk. Red Productions for Channel 4 Corporation. First broadcast: Channel 4, 23rd February 1999.

Skins. Company Pictures for Channel 4 Corporation. First broadcast: E4, 25th January 2007.

The State Within. British Broadcasting Corporation for BBC America. First broadcast: BBC1, 2nd November 2006 [UK].

Sugar Rush. Shine Limited for Channel 4 Corporation. First broadcast: Channel 4, 7th June 2005.

Tipping the Velvet. Sally Head Productions for BBC TV. First broadcast: BBC2, 9th October 2002.

Torchwood. BBC Wales. First broadcast: BBC3, 22nd October 2006.